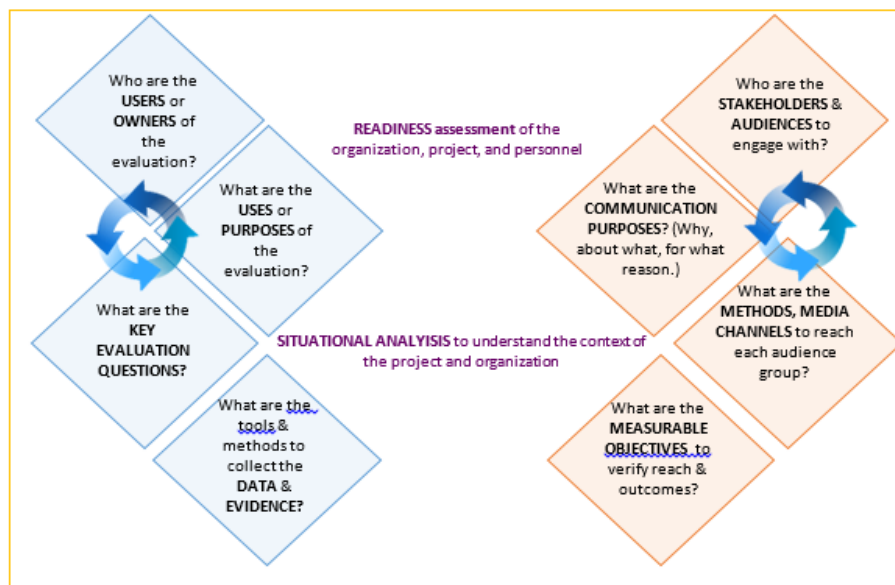


Evaluation of DECI-2

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Draft version 2



DECI mentoring steps for utilisation-focussed evaluation (on the left) and research communication (on the right) (Source: Ramirez and Broadhead, 2016)

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Acronyms

ADC	Asociación de Derechos Civiles
BECA	Building Capacity for Ecohealth Research and Practice in Asia
CARIAA	Collaborative Adaptation Research Initiative in Africa and Asia
CBRM	Capacity Building in Resource Mobilization
CCAA	Climate Change Adaptation in Africa
CONDATOS	The Latin America and the Caribbean Open Data Conference
DECI	Developing Evaluation and Communication Capacity in Information Society Research
DL4D	Digital Learning for Development
EAFIT	Escuela de Administración, Finanzas e Instituto Tecnológico
FIRE	Fund for Internet Research and Education
FRIDA	Regional Fund for Digital Innovation in Latin America and the Caribbean
IDRC	The International Development Research Centre
INASSA	Information and Networks in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa
ISIF	Information Society Innovation Fund Asia
ITT	Think Tank Initiative
KEQ	Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs).
KNOWFOR	International Forestry Knowledge :
KSI	Knowledge Sector Initiative
MCCC	Managing Change, Coping with Complexity
NE	Networked Economies (NE) programme
OCSDNet	The Open and Collaborative Science in Development Network
ODDC	Exploring the Emerging Impacts of Open Data in Developing Countries
OpAsha	Operation ASHA
PEC	Policy Engagement and Communications (PEC) program
PI	Privacy International
ResCom	Research Communications
RIA	Research ICTs Africa
ROER4D	Research on Open Educational Resources for Development
SEARCH	Strengthening Equity through Applied Research Capacity Building in e-Health
UFE	Utilization Focused Evaluation

Note about terminology: throughout this report both DECI-2 and DECI are used. DECI-2 is used to refer to the project under evaluation. DECI is used to refer to the model developed in the first phase and refined in the second phase. DECI also refers to the team implementing the project.

1 Acknowledgements

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2 Executive Summary

2.1 Introduction

DECI-2 is a capacity development initiative funded by the Networked Economies (NE) programme at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and implemented by the New Economy Development Group based in Ottawa, Canada. It stands for Developing Evaluation and Communication Capacity in Information Societies Research and its purpose is to support research projects funded by the NE programme in Utilisation Focussed Evaluation (UFE) and Research Communication (ResCom). It aims to enhance the internal learning culture within projects and enable projects to focus on early communication planning to enhance the reach.

This evaluation's primary aim is to inform NE's decision-making regarding a future phase of DECI. It included evaluation questions exploring the success, strengths, weakness and comparative advantages of DECI (to other capacity development programmes). The evaluation primarily focused on interviewing key stakeholders including the DECI team, the mentors, and a sample of partners. Documentation produced by the DECI team and partners was examined, and a sample of documentation and budgets from similar programmes was considered in order to gain a view on how DECI outcomes compared with other 'capacity development' initiatives.

2.2 Findings and analysis

2.2.1 DECI-2's key results

DECI's key result is that partner organisations are using UFE and ResCom to adapt their project strategies, improve their operations and build better relationships with their stakeholders. Their self-reported commentary is supported by observations and documentation by the programme implementers. The DECI-2 model itself is a key result. The research and development work by the programme has led to an approach which has proven effective at building evaluation and communication capacity, particularly the approach to readiness assessment and mentoring.

The report finds that there are a number of positive changes in partners as a result of the DECI process. This includes examples of partners gaining knowledge and evaluation and communication techniques, practicing more informed approaches to monitoring and evaluation and building evaluation and communication into their way of working. Overall, there were clear examples of regular reflection on their research practice and there was an increase in questioning of assumptions. This has led to improved delivery of objectives and using data to inform decision making. Some spin offs of the processes include developing stronger relationships with their stakeholders, partners and peers, and the use of evaluation findings to raise new funds. Some also commented that the process made reporting to IDRC easier.

DECI-2, like its predecessor, seeks to invest in the mentors it works with. Mentors are not just consultants contracted to deliver a service but are treated as beneficiaries of DECI-2 and partners in the research process. All mentors interviewed mentioned that through working with DECI-2, their evaluation and/or communication practice had improved.

The DECI-2 PIs and mentors have regularly reflected on their own processes and attempted to capture new knowledge through case studies and research reports. The research tends to focus on the processes involved in setting up and conducting DECI-2. Two topics in particular are: The concept of readiness is much discussed and seen as a key to unlocking a pertinent and useful process for the

partner, and the integration of UFE and ResCom into a coherent package than can be communicated clearly to potential partners.

The evaluators did not find any evidence of negative effects of participating in DECI-2 from those interviewed.

2.2.2 Strengths and weaknesses of DECI-2

The most cited area mentioned was the face to face visits of mentors followed by the questioning and listening approach of mentors and how they are available when needed. Partners also appreciate when mentors take a more active role and offer advice, feedback and guidance. Partners appreciated the opportunity to learn from other partners going through the same process. Finally, partners appreciated the UFE and ResCom approaches and the materials provided by DECI-2, although mentions of these more concrete features were far less common than the *softer* features above. The mentors also appreciated the face to face visits, the support from the DECI-2 principal investigators and learning from their colleagues.

While the overarching sense from partners was very positive, partners mentioned several aspects of the experience which they found challenging. The most common issue was communication from DECI-2. Some mentors and partners suggested the process is too loose with not enough structure, particularly at the beginning. In some cases, the contact person benefitted significantly more than the rest of the project/organisation. They also thought the process was very time intensive. Finally, as reported by one of the partners, the webinars in particular were less helpful as they required a lot of work and the individual exercises didn't always connect. As with many projects relying on virtual communication there were logistical and connectivity problems.

We summarise the strengths of the programme as building relationships between mentor and mentee, allowing time, assessing readiness at the beginning, understanding context, focussing the exercise on the needs of the partner and their stakeholders, and mentors being available as sounding boards as partners develop new areas. DECI-2 has many elements of any participatory programme of development. The classic community development social mobilisation model relies on factors such as building relationships, allowing people to go at their own pace, not being afraid to walk away from communities that do not want to yet engage with change, identifying avenues for enhanced knowledge, and creating a platform for sharing such knowledge. Reflection and action walking together.

However, while this adaptation and evolution of thought had its benefits, it also sometimes brought confusion. A weakness of the programme was that, while the general research objectives of the programme were clear, it was not always clear if a particular exercise was for DECI benefit or intended to be for benefit of the partner. People universally were not sure what they were getting in to; the objectives and benefit for the partners was not clear at the start. Most of the weaknesses would be addressable if there were a DECI-3.

2.2.3 Comparing DECI-2 with other initiatives

The report presents a brief synopsis on nine other programmes with similar aims to DECI-2, including seven funded by or through IDRC, one funded by UK Department for International Development and one funded by Australian Department for Foreign Affairs. Comparisons are made with DECI-2; qualitatively with regards to a number of variables including target groups and geographic and thematic scope; and quantitatively with regards to cost per partner per year. It also discusses existing online resource seeking to inform researchers.

DECI-2 has many similarities to the other initiatives examined. Most including the use of mentoring as a key strategy, the use of independent consultants as mentors, the development of tailored materials and worked in multiple countries. There were significant variances also which confound comparison. Some of the initiatives worked at organisational level, others at project level, and one at individual level. The size of programmes varied, the largest working with 43 organisations, the smallest working with 3. Some of the initiatives were run by IDRC directly, others were contracted out through an open tender, and others like DECI-2 were contracted out directly to a known supplier. DECI-2 is unique in its offer of evaluation and communication capacity, its use of two mentors per partner, and also in its explicit applied research component, which is integrated into its approach and cannot be isolated from the budget.

A raw calculation of cost of the programmes per grantee per year results in a range from CAD 2k to CAD 74k, with a mean of CAD 27k and a median of CAD 20k. DECI-2 is calculated to cost CAD 26.5k per partner per year, showing that the while DECI is slightly higher than most, it is of the same order as others.

Because of the many confounding factors presented above, the cost-effectiveness analysis is not considered robust enough to be able to say whether one programme is better value than another programme. However, in consideration of its unique characteristics, DECI-2 is considered to be highly competitive with other programmes.

2.3 Conclusion

DECI-2 works and is an effective model, comparable with other models of capacity development found in IDRC and the programmes of other donors. The key takeaway is that the team needs more confidence in their approach and should be stronger in advocating for it. They have a good product – market it. This refers to the mentoring approach and the UFE and ResCom content. The crux of the value that is added is not the UFE or ResCom capacity per se but the critical thinking that is embodied with the DECI-2 approach. Participants across the board have benefitted from questioning the way they do things – not just by improving to better achieve their objectives but also by building this reflective way of working into their approach so they continue to benefit. From our interviews, it was clear that few if any of the partners expected the intense strategic reflection which DECI-2 provides - most thought it would be more surface level capacity building. It is therefore difficult to know whether to recommend that any consideration of DECI-3 be rebranded as a very long mentored ‘strategic reflection’ exercise or whether the focus on a tangible output such as UFE continue as the bait for such.

Any DECI-3 planning would best include a more explicit theory of change including differentiated levels of outcomes (expect, like, love to see) expressed as behaviour change in the partners and their associates. It could also include a more explicit analysis of the key strengths of mentors not just in terms of their ‘technical’ skill (ie knowledge of UFE) but also of their facilitating skills.

3 Background

3.1 DECI-2

DECI-2 is a capacity development initiative funded by the Networked Economies (NE) programme at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and implemented by the New Economy Development Group based in Ottawa, Canada. It stands for Developing Evaluation and Communication Capacity in Information Societies Research and its purpose is to support research projects funded by the NE programme in Utilisation Focussed Evaluation (UFE) and Research Communication (ResCom). It aims to enhance the internal learning culture within projects and enable projects to focus attention early on communication planning to enhance the reach and uptake of research outcomes. It is also an action research project with the aim to learn about building evaluation and communication capacity.

DECI-2 is the second iteration of the programme. The first iteration, from 2010 to 2012, was designed to provide ongoing mentoring and action learning on how to apply UFE in selected ICT4D (Information and Communication Technologies for Development) programmes in Asia. DECI-2 is an evolution of DECI, in that the model was expanded to incorporate ResCom as well as UFE, given the common elements across both approaches. DECI-2 was also expanded beyond Asia to include research projects in Africa and Latin America.

The overall objective of DECI-2 is to build capacity in evaluation and communication among global Networked Economies flagship projects. The specific objectives are the following:

1. **Meta-level action-research:** To develop and test-drive a combined approach to UFE and ResCom mentoring.
2. **Capacity development for regional consultants:** To build capacity among regional evaluation consultants (*mentors*) in the concepts and practices of both UFE and ResCom.
3. **Capacity development for project partners:** To provide technical assistance to I&N project researchers, communications staff and evaluators toward improving their evaluation and ResCom knowledge and skills.
4. **Assistance to project evaluations and communication planning:** To contribute towards the completion of UFE evaluations and communication strategies for designated I&N flagship projects.
5. **Sharing lessons:** To communicate the DECI-2 project findings and training approach to practitioners, researchers and policy makers.

DECI was initially designed in 2009 as a response to the predominant mode of providing capacity building at the time, which mostly involved sending people to training workshops. DECI's approach is centred on one-on-one mentoring between mentors located in the region of the research projects and an assigned contact person from the research project. The approach taken by the DECI team has evolved over time, through an adaptive management style which embeds systematic learning. The guiding principles at the time of writing, which were developed in the process of DECI-2 as part of their own learning are presented in Box 1 (Ramirez and Broadhead, 2016). Further elaboration on DECI-2's approach can be found in section 5.1.

1. Evaluation is used as a decision-making framework
2. Communication enhances use of findings for influence
3. Attention is paid to readiness from the beginning
4. Training is delivered through demand-driven just-in-time mentoring
5. Course correction of project strategy is expected and planned
6. Utilization is the focus from initial project design to completion
7. A collaborative, learning and reflective process is embedded
8. Participation and shared ownership are fundamental
9. The process builds individual and organizational capacity
10. Complexity and evolving contexts are addressed

Box 1: DECI-2 principles

3.2 DECI-2 Partners

Since it started, DECI-2 has worked with 16 projects, not all of which progressed beyond the readiness step. This includes IDRC funded projects as well as grantees of those projects. There were other projects which were approached by DECI but did not proceed even to the early stages – these have not been discussed in this report¹. A full list and further details of the partners are in section 5.2.

3.3 Networked Economies programme

DECI-2 is an initiative of the Networked Economies (NE) programme at IDRC and all DECI-2 partners are either grantees of the NE programme or are grantees of grantees. The NE programme's stated goal is to harness digital innovations that create inclusive economic opportunities and advance democracy in the developing world. It does this through research grants and support to individuals, civil society, governments, and the private sector. It has three priorities:

1. Test and scale digital innovations to improve entrepreneurship, education, and democracy. Improve social and commercial entrepreneurship, and build an understanding of how digital innovations enhance or hinder democratic governance, education, and economic opportunities.
2. Connect the next billion to economic opportunities. Ensure the Internet is accessible, affordable, and usable by those at the bottom of the economic pyramid, and support research that identifies gendered and socio-economic divisions of access for the next billion.
3. Improve governance of cyberspace. Advance a nuanced understanding of the challenges of Internet governance and provide evidence-based solutions to the legal, technical, and security challenges of organizations enforcing regulations in cyberspace. (IDRC website 2017)

The NE programme manages the INASSA (Information and Networks in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa) project, which is co-funded between IDRC and the UK Department for International Development and runs from 2013 to 2018. INASSA provides support for 11 research networks partnered by the NE programme and also provides additional support for DECI-2.

¹ Including Open Government based in the Philippines and Engage Media based in Indonesia.

4 About the Evaluation

4.1 Purpose and questions

The general objective of this evaluation is to inform NE's decision-making regarding a future phase of DECI. Secondary objectives include:

- Assessing the relative effectiveness of the DECI mentorship model compared to other IDRC capacity building approaches
- Inform the current and potential future Networked Economies capacity building activities
- Inform the development of the emerging hybrid (research communications and UFE) model.

The following are the key evaluation questions. These were initially developed by the NE team together with the DECI-2 team, and agreed by the evaluators with a very slight modification to question four, which emphasises the *who* question over the *what* question which is covered in question three.

1. What have been DECI's (1&2) key results, whether positive or negative, for grantees, the IN/NE program, and for wider audiences?
2. How effective is the DECI-model compared to alternative capacity building models at IDRC?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the DECI capacity development mentorship model? Of the model combined with the area of mentorship (UFE, Research Communications, and the UFE-ResCom hybrid)?
4. For whom does the DECI mentorship model work well and in what circumstances?
5. What can the DECI mentorship model learn from other capacity building approaches?
6. In what ways can the NE team and overall program/prospectus design improve support for a DECI-2-type mentorship process including attention to partner readiness and PO endorsement?
7. To what extent is the combination of project objectives (research & innovation, capacity development for regional mentors, mentoring to NE partners) worth maintaining in a future phase?

4.2 Evaluation approach

The evaluation terms of reference were developed by IDRC following a utilisation-focussed approach. This involved the DECI-2 principle investigators in developing the purpose of the evaluation and the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs). Once commissioned, we, the evaluators, were invited to review the KEQs and did not find a reason to amend them.

The evaluators developed an approach based on documentation and where possible interviews with key stakeholders. 39 interviews were conducted, including DECI team members (10), DECI partners (10), comparator programmes in IDRC (13), other comparator programmes (3) and other IDRC staff (3). The list of interviews is given in Annex 1. The documents consulted are listed in Annex 2. While the evaluation undertook 'internal' triangulation of data, a weakness of the evaluation was the limited external triangulation of data; this would have required more resources.

The interviews were conducted with the understanding that they would be anonymous, although with such a small sample and relatively defined programme of work complete anonymity would be difficult to achieve. There is no reason to believe that this influenced the responses. The responses were analysed using Nvivo 10 and 11.

DECI is framed as a capacity building programme of work, and as such we used the conceptual and experiential models found in Fowler, A. and Ubels, J. 2010, Punton, M. 2014 and Champion, D. P., Kiel, D. H. and McLendon, J. A. 2010. to guide our thinking. In brief, capacity development involves complex situations with multiple actors. Fowler and Ubels, for instance, draw on CDRA work to point to the importance of vision, strategy and culture as facets of understanding this complexity. Culture is a neglected aspect, and while IDRC (eg within Outcome Mapping) draws attention to underlying values of stakeholders, the idea of culture is, in our view, often neglected in developmental discussions. Punton influences our thinking by pointing at personal change and changing relationships as marks of changing capacity, picking up on Fowler and Abels focus on culture. In DECI where mentoring across cultures is expected to result in changed behaviour, we looked for personal change and changing relationships within the data.

Fowler and Ubels also talk about capacity as capacity to 'do something' - drawing on ECDPM work they focus on the ability to self-organise and act. This is why in data gathering we also attempted to focus on evidence that the 'indirect' partners are taking action, the layer of people beyond those directly interacting with the mentors. Champions et al's (2010) work reflects more directly on the possible roles of the mentors, the outsider to the insider relationships, of the consultant and whether they are matched to the (complex) situation.

Research question 2 had an element of 'how cost effective...' was the programme compared to alternative capacity building models. A full cost effective analysis was not possible within the time frame and resources of this study. Section 5.7 describes some alternative programmes, and offers insights into elements of the programme that are similar or different from DECI, while 6.2.1 seeks a broad-brush overview of budgets and costs.

5 Findings

This section presents a synthesis of the data obtained by this evaluation. It covers the evaluators' understanding of how the programme works, an overview of the partners and outputs produced, the outcomes in terms of changes in partners' and mentors' behaviour, the elements of DECI-2 reported to have worked well and those reported to have worked less well, contributing and inhibiting factors and a comparison of DECI-2 with other similar initiatives.

5.1 How DECI-2 works

As a research project, there is no fixed model in DECI-2 for delivering capacity building. There were some initial conditions based on experiences from DECI-1 and literature review on research communications, but the model has largely emerged over time through trial and error. It is pertinent, therefore, to provide a snapshot of what the model currently looks like, from the perspective of the evaluators, a year from the end of the project.

5.1.1 Key components

The evaluation team summarises the key components of the DECI-2 model as:

1. **Targeting networks and grantees** of research projects working in the global south.
2. **Supporting strategic reflection and decision making to increase influence** by focussing clients on users and uses of their evaluations and/or research.
3. **Using a conceptual framework** based on the integration of Utilisation Focussed Evaluation (UFE) and Research Communication (ResCom).
4. **Working through UFE and ResCom mentors** based in the same region as the clients.
5. **Providing mentoring over a long time-period** (one to two years) on an on-demand basis, responding to needs of clients.
6. **Providing mentoring predominantly through virtual means**, with at least one face to face engagement.
7. **Assessing readiness and client context** to assess feasibility and relevance of mentoring and to tailor the support to individual clients, focussing on their immediate and strategic needs.
8. **Mentoring the mentors** through collaborative projects and regular debriefing and reflection.
9. **Meta action-research** to document and analyse the process through case studies and other research.

5.1.2 Methodological foundation

Figure 1 describes the methodological foundations of DECI's two parallel streams, with UFE on the left and ResCom on the right. The model allows flexibility in how participants follow these steps with their mentors, and the extent to which the evaluation and communication streams are integrated, if at all. Common in every application of this approach though is the readiness assessment and the situational analysis facilitated by mentors.

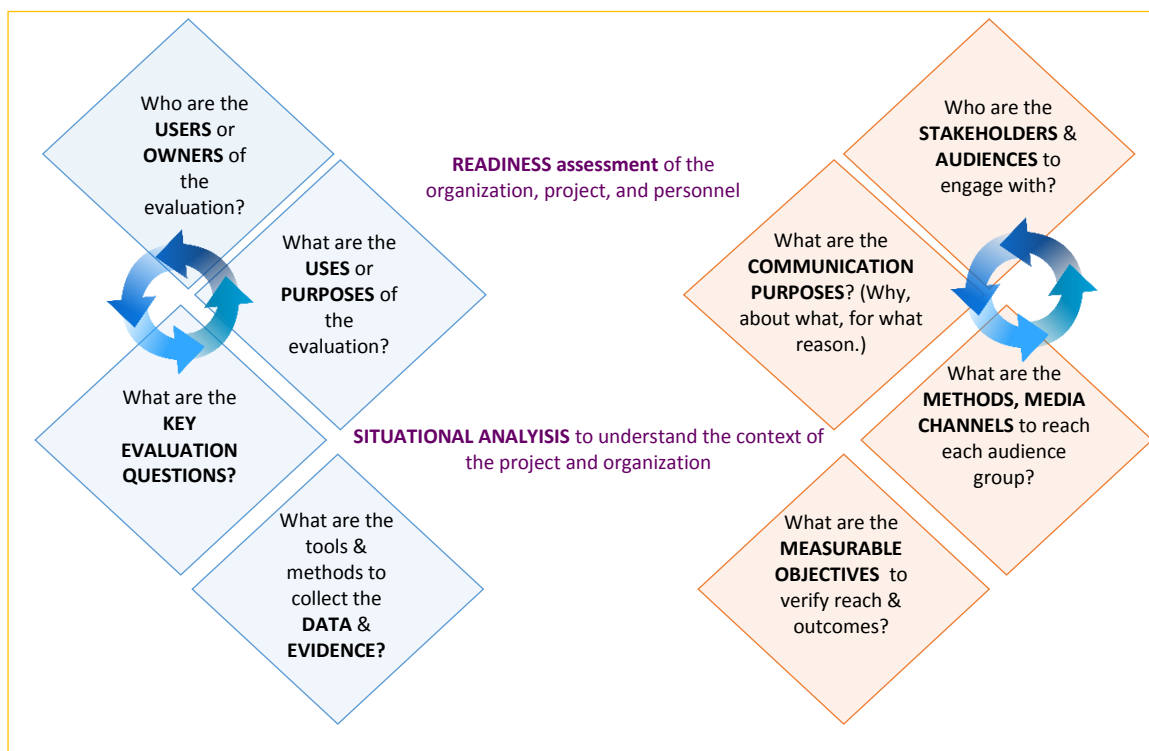


Figure 1: DECI mentoring steps for utilisation-focused evaluation (on the left) and research communication (on the right) (Source: Ramirez and Broadhead, 2016)

5.1.3 Implementation process

The mentoring partnerships in DECI-2 follow a similar overall process, as depicted in Figure 2. They start with initial meetings to assess readiness, a concept which itself is evolving as the team learns more about what it takes to be involved in a mentoring arrangement like DECI-2. It may take several meetings until the DECI-2 PIs and mentors are satisfied that the readiness criteria have been met.

Once readiness is confirmed a memorandum of understanding is signed between the partner and DECI-2, clarifying the expectations on both sides about how the mentoring will proceed. In practice readiness is continuously monitored even after signing the MoU, as it has been found that partners' situation changes or mentors learn more about partners and reassess readiness.

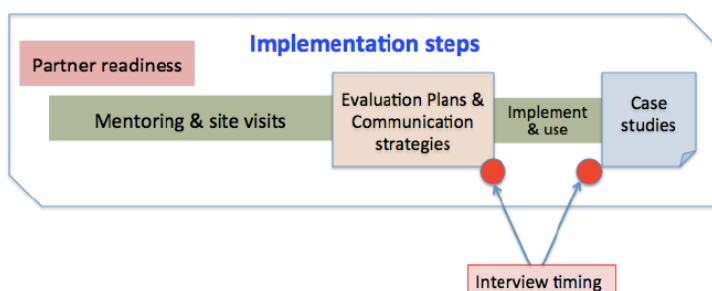


Figure 2: DECI-2 implementation steps (Source: DECI-2 Sixth Interim Technical Report, July 2015)

The mentoring takes place at the pace of the partner – if they are in a busy period then mentoring may not get going for months. Mentoring will be delivered predominantly through Skype calls between a DECI-2 appointed mentor and a contact person appointed by the partner. In most cases there will be a mentor and contact for both evaluation and communication, although in some cases

the contact person will be same. At some point in the process there will be at least one face to face meeting, preferably a site visit by the mentor. This is important for the mentor's understanding of the partner's context and clarifying the problem they seeking to address.

Mentoring focusses on two aims. The first aim is to support the partner to develop an evaluation plan and/or a communication strategy. The evaluation is usually led by the evaluation contact person but they are encouraged to work closely with the primary intended users of the evaluation who could be internal or external actors. Likewise, the communication strategy is usually developed by the communication contact person with support from their colleagues. The second aim is to support the partner to implement and use these tools.

Wrapped around this process is the meta-action-research, which involved regular interviews between the DECI-2 PIs and the mentors; and the mentors and mentees and others in the partner's project/organisation. The culmination of this is the development of a case study led by the mentor with input from the DECI-2 PIs and comments from the partners.

The expected outputs from each partnership are documented by DECI-2 as (DECI-2 Sixth interim report, July 2015):

1. Memorandum of Understanding signed
2. Evaluation plan and/or communication strategies
3. UFE reports and/or ResCom reports
4. Reflections by partners on the mentoring process and outcomes
5. Presentations by the partner detailing the evolution of the process
6. Case studies, subsequent blogs, articles, presentations, & publications

5.2 Overview of DECI-2 partners

DECI-2 worked with different kinds of partners at different times, different scales and because of the readiness requirements not all of the partnerships proceeded to full mentoring. An overview of all projects and their outputs is presented in section 5.2.1 and a timeline showing when the projects were active is presented in section 5.2.1. A summary narrative for each partner, providing a brief biography and description of the mentoring process with DECI-2, can be found in Annex 3.

Overall, DECI-2 mentored (or are currently mentoring) six network projects and seven sub projects (small projects or grantees of major projects), and three networks which didn't proceed beyond readiness.

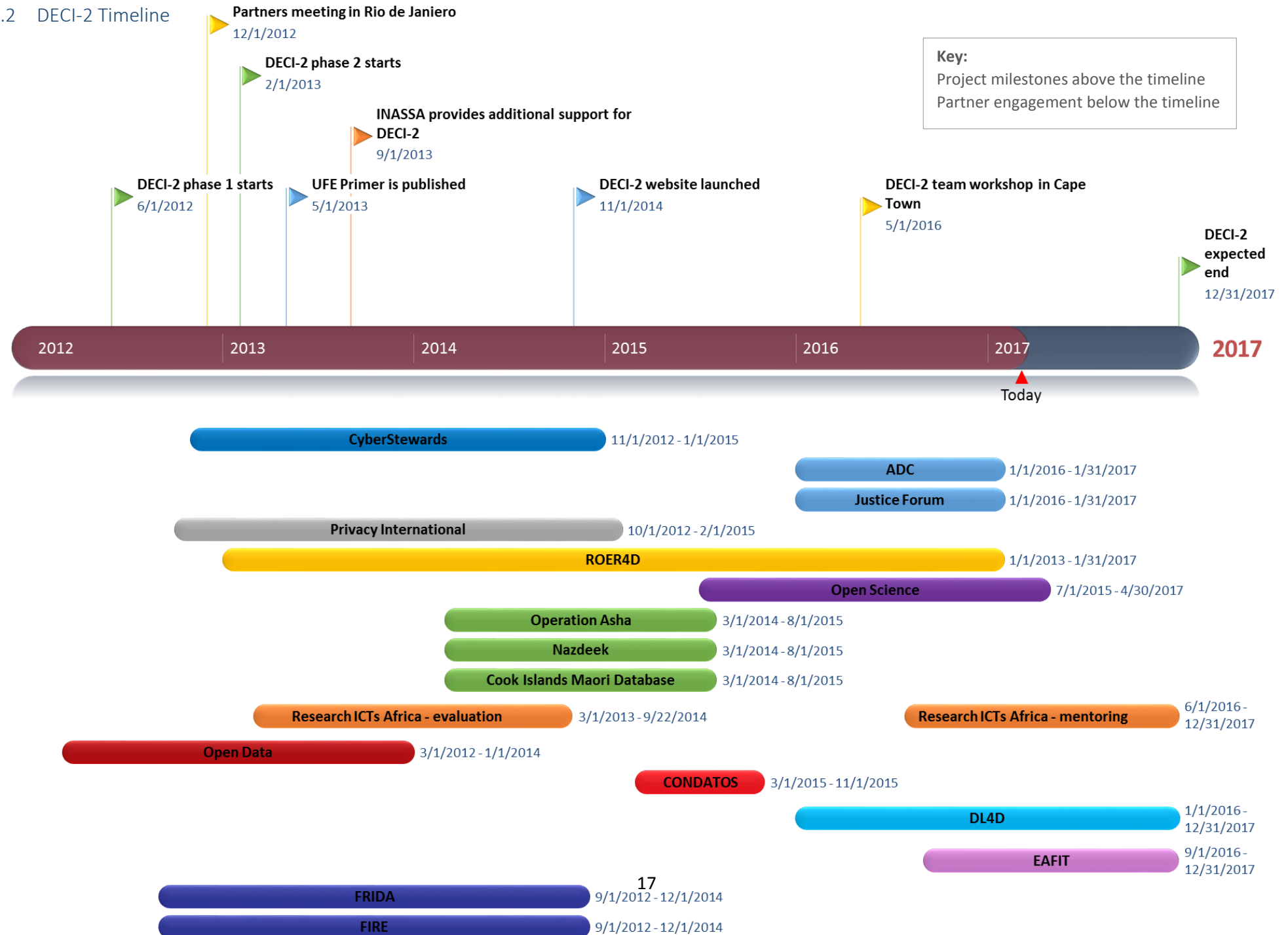
5.2.1 Summary table

Partner	Type	MoU signed	Readiness	UFE completed	ResCom completed	Case study completed	Presentations / reflections	Notes
Cyber Stewards (hosted by Citizen Lab, Canada)	Network	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	After working with Cyber Stewards network hub, DECI-2 was invited to work with Cyber Stewards grantees.
Asociación de Derechos Civiles ADC, Argentina (CyberStewards grantee)	Grantee	✓	✓	In progress	In progress	In progress	In progress	
Justice Forum, UK (CyberStewards grantee)	Grantee	✓	✓	✗	In progress	In progress	In progress	
Protecting Privacy in an Increasingly Digital Developing World (hosted by Privacy International, UK)	Network	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Research on Open Educational Resources for Development, ROER4D (hosted by the University of Cape Town, South Africa)	Network	✓	✓	✓	✓	In progress	✓	
The Open and Collaborative Science in Development Network (hosted by iHub, Nairobi)	Network	✓	✓	✓	✓	In progress	✓	Open Science had a limited budget for evaluation and communication work and engaged with DECI-2 through a lighter process than normal.
Operation Asha, Cambodia (grantee of ISIF, a DECI-1 partner)	Grantee	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	ISIF was a partner in DECI-1 and received UFE mentoring. They invited DECI-2 to work with three of their grantees. ISIF funds DECI-2 directly for this support. A combined case study was published by DECI-2.
Nazdeek, India (grantee of ISIF, a DECI-1 partner)	Grantee	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Cook Islands Maori Database, Cook Islands (grantee of ISIF, a DECI-1 partner)	Grantee	✓	✓	✓	✓		✗	

Research ICTs Africa, RIA	Network	✓	✓	✓	In progress	✓	✓	DECI-2 was commissioned by IDRC to do an evaluation of RIA. This has been followed up with mentoring on ResCom.
Exploring the Emerging Impacts of Open Data in Developing Countries, ODDC (hosted by the World Wide Web Foundation foundation)	Network	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	The MoU with the World Wide Web Foundation to work with their global network was cancelled with mutual agreement. Opportunities were sought to work with them regionally. This led DECI-2 to work with the organisers of the CONDATOS conference, affiliated with the Open Data project.
The Latin America and the Caribbean Open Data Conference, CONDATOS (with Fundación Avina)	Sub-project	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	
Digital Learning for Development, DL4D (hosted by FIT-ED in Manila)	Network	✓	✓	In progress	In progress	In progress	In progress	Mentoring started in September 2016.
Escuela de Administración, Finanzas e Instituto Tecnológico, EAFIT	Sub-project	In progress	In progress	In progress	In progress	In progress	In progress	Initial meeting in September 2016. Mentoring has not yet started.
Regional Fund for Digital Innovation in Latin America and the Caribbean, FRIDA (hosted by LACNIC and part of SEED Alliance)	Network	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	FRIDA and FIRE were introduced to DECI-2 by their fellow SEED Alliance member, ISIF. While there was significant interaction between DECI-2 and both projects, neither of them progressed beyond readiness as they were both in a period of flux with respect to senior management and key staff.
Fund for Internet Research and Education, FIRE (hosted by Afrinic, Mauritius and part of SEED Alliance)	Network	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	

Table 1: DECI-2 Partners

5.2.2 DECI-2 Timeline



5.3 Outcomes of DECI-2

DECI-2 is primarily interested in building evaluation and communication capacity of research networks and projects, but it also explicitly seeks to build capacity of regional consultants to provide mentoring support, as well as aiming to generate knowledge about mentoring and building evaluation and communication capacity through action research.

The evaluators did not find an explicit description of the intended outcomes of the mentoring process – for example, a theory of change, logical framework or outcome hierarchy showing the kinds of changes they were aiming for in their mentoring of partners. The evaluators found that the mentors each had an implicit understanding of what they wanted to see with their mentees, but this was not made explicit or generalised across the group. The following list of changes expected by mentors evolved during the course of the evaluation. Mentors wanted to see partners:

- Expressing interest in and committing to the learning process; e.g. by asking provocative questions;
- Progressing beyond the challenge of understanding the DECI-2 approach and able to work productively with the mentor;
- An ability to explain why they are doing an evaluation and/or why they are communicating;
- An ability to apply the UFE and ResCom steps themselves for their own purposes, e.g. challenging themselves to be more explicit about purposes;
- Learning from applications of UFE;
- Changing their way of thinking about communication: e.g. by focussing on the audience/users before the product/process;
- Demonstrating more confidence in delivering their work;
- Offering feedback and suggestions for improving DECI-2.

5.3.1 Changes in partners

DECI-2 didn't start with a particular model of how partners would benefit from the mentoring process – partly because as a research project this was something which they would learn during the project, but also because they expected each project to have different needs, different contexts and thus respond in different ways. This evaluation has been able to document particular trends in how partners have reportedly benefited from DECI-2. The outcomes summarised here are based on examples of concrete changes reported by partners and triangulated with interviews with mentors and DECI-2 documentation.

The data shows a progression in the types of outcomes observed from, partners' skills to critical thinking to decision making. Firstly, there is evidence that their evaluation and communication skills are enhanced. Secondly, there is evidence that they are subsequently more reflective of their practice and thinking more critically about their work. Thirdly, there is evidence that their approach to achieving objectives is improved through more informed decision making and more nuanced-strategies to achieve their objectives. These three types of change plus some additional observations are summarised below.

1. Improved evaluation and communication approaches

All partners are **gaining knowledge on evaluation and communication techniques** and are applying those skills in other work. E.g. Operation Asha is using UFE on another project, to help understand is a new technology is delivering the intended benefits; the evaluation contact person at Cyber Stewards has applied the UFE concepts in several other projects, including a social impact

assessment; and the communications contact person at ROER4D has made presentations about research communication to colleagues.

All partners are **practicing more informed approaches to evaluation and communication** in their work. For example, Open Science is choosing tools which are more suitable and thinking about why they are using them, and what they will achieve with them; Operation Asha is more targeted with their evaluation, using it to respond to their organisational needs as well as the donor's needs; and ROER4D is now using audience research to tailor its communications to different audiences.

Most partners are **building evaluation and communication into their way of working**. E.g. ISIF has integrated parts of the DECI approach into their grant making process; Open Science has built stakeholder analysis into their approach to planning and assessing network activities; and Cyber Stewards have integrated DECI-inspired data collection techniques into their workshop delivery.

2. Increased understanding of their practice

Most partners have incorporated **regular reflection on their practice**, taking time to discuss among their teams how they are doing and what they are learning. E.g. for the first time the organisers of the CONDATOS conference explicitly discussed their objectives and the theme of the conference; Open Science picked up that gender was a common trend among all projects but wasn't picked up as a cross-cutting issue at the start; and ROER4D have developed a collaborative process for the team to question what they are doing and make changes according to their context.

Some partners have begun to **question their assumptions** and beliefs about how they hope to influence change. E.g. ADC found the DECI-2 process surfaced the assumptions held by different team members and made them explicit for the first time; and Cyber Stewards found that discussions with DECI-2 mentors challenged their assumptions and got them thinking along different lines.

Some partners have **become aware of blind spots** in the way they work. E.g. the organisers of the CONDATOS conference had not previously considered setting explicit objectives; Cyber Stewards hadn't previously questioned whether they were a network or a project; and Open Science found that there were different ideas within the network about where they were heading.

3. Improved delivery of objectives

Many partners are found to be **improving delivery of their project or network activities**. E.g. DECI-2 evaluation practices are helping ROER4D improve their virtual training sessions; Cyber Stewards made changes to their project design in phase two based on feedback from the evaluation that recommended more collaboration between projects; and Privacy International established a new communication platform allowing partners to communicate with each other more easily.

Many partners are increasingly **using data to inform their decision making** about who to engage with, what action to take and how to use resources. E.g. Nazdeek used data about who was reporting rights violations using their app, and who was not, to address a power issue which was a barrier to the changes they were seeking; Justice Forum used data about who was reading their reports to decide how best to communicate with their audience; and ROER4D now routinely feed evaluation findings into their weekly planning meetings.

Many partners are **developing more appropriate, relevant and targeted strategies** to achieve their goals. E.g. Nazdeek completely changed their strategy from challenging the government through legal battles to working collaboratively with government to address rights violations; Cyber Stewards changed their approach to working with partners when they realised they needed to build a network

that didn't yet exist; Open Science report that DECI-2 has helped them move away from broad activities to focus more on what they want to achieve as a network; and Privacy International developed a strategy and restructured the organisation towards working with partners in the global south. Additionally, the Cook Islands Internet Action Group now takes on and manages projects based on the impact on target beneficiaries as opposed to the technology itself.

4. Other changes

In addition to the changes documented above, partners reported change which did not fit in the above categories.

Several partners have **developed stronger relationships** with stakeholders, partners and peers. For example, relationships between members of the Cyber Stewards network were stronger; Open Science and ROER4D have developed a relationship where they can learn from each other; Privacy International were introduced to other experts in the policy influence field and were able to learn from them; By presenting useful evidence, Operation Asha was invited to join a Government-led technical working group.

A few partners have been able to **use evaluation findings to attract new funding**. For example, by sharing the outcomes of their pilot project, Operation Asha have been able to raise their profile and receive attention from potential donors and RIA have been able to use evaluation findings to enrich the theory of change they use in their proposals.

One partner, Cyber Stewards, found that the UFE process **made reporting to IDRC easier** by providing data which is easily transferable.

5.3.2 Changes in mentors

DECI-2, like its predecessor, seeks to invest in the mentors it works with. Mentors are not just consultants contracted to deliver a service but they are treated as beneficiaries of DECI-2 and partners in the research process. DECI-1 left a strong legacy in the three South Asian mentors involved in the project, with all of them continuing to apply the UFE skills they honed with DECI in the evaluations they have been involved in since. One of them has continued as a mentor in DECI-2.

DECI-2 has had similar success but with more variation. DECI-2 has worked with mentors across three continents, has supported research communications as well as UFE and taken on more and more varied projects than DECI-1, with large networks as in DECI-1 but also smaller grantee-level projects. Each of these factors increases the complexity of DECI-2 compared with DECI-1 and has had an effect on the extent to which mentors have benefitted.

In Asia, the dynamic between the mentors worked very well, with one experienced UFE mentor teamed with a newcomer as ResCom mentor. The three projects they worked on were related to each other and had many similarities with common donors, similar objectives and scale. The two mentors worked together on all three projects and developed a set of webinars to deliver to the partners. These experiences meant that there was a high level of cooperation between the two mentors offering many opportunities to learn from each other.

In Latin America, the situation was quite different. As in Asia, one mentor had some experience with DECI but the technical approach was completely new to them both. The main challenge was a lack of projects to work with. There was some difficulty early on in finding partners who were at the right level of readiness to proceed with mentoring, and in the cases where there was progress, there was generally an unequal balance in the interest in ResCom and UFE, meaning the mentors didn't work closely together very often. The relatively small number of partners also meant that the mentors did

not have sufficient work to maintain their focus on DECI-2, as, understandably, DECI-2 was only a part of their workload. The ResCom mentor in particular ended up with far less than expected engagement with DECI-2, limiting the benefit that may have been gained.

In East Africa, it was a mixed experience. Both mentors were completely new to DECI and DECI's UFE and ResCom approach, and of the three regions received the most support from the PIs. Like Latin America there were partners which were pursued but didn't progress beyond the readiness stage, and one which ended up being supported by the PIs based in Canada rather than by the East African mentors. Nonetheless the mentors were able to support several partners each. In particular, the evaluation of RIA, which was conducted by the DECI-2 team including the East Africa mentors, provided necessary experience and learning about DECI's UFE approach, and proved to be an effective way for the PIs to mentor the mentors.

Despite the challenges above, the following changes were reported by the mentors:

All of the mentors interviewed mentioned that through working with DECI-2, **their evaluation and/or communication practice had improved**. Two of the evaluation mentors mentioned that UFE is now integral in their work and they apply it in other projects outside DECI-2. One of the communication mentors mentioned that DECI-2 has greatly influenced their everyday work. Two of the mentors mentioned that DECI-2 has helped them be more reflective and explicit about their own learning, and one mentioned that they have learned from their mentee's style of working.

Two of the mentors have reported that **their confidence has grown** through working with DECI-2, both in their role as mentor and their practice as evaluator. In addition, the DECI-2 PIs report that five out of the six mentors have demonstrably grown in confidence since the start of the project, as evidenced by their increasing independence working with partners.

Mentors reported that DECI-2 **changed their understanding of capacity building**, especially through DECI's emphasis on assessing readiness, its uniqueness in providing mentoring to the mentors and its approach of providing proactive support where mentors seek to understand the situation of the mentee and adapt their approach as necessary.

All of the mentors interviewed are reported to have **improved their knowledge and practice of their non-specialist area** (evaluation mentors are improving communications and communications mentors are improving evaluation). One communication mentor reports that she now using theory of change more actively in a project for learning and adaptation, and two of the evaluation mentors are now able to support communications mentoring as well.

5.3.3 Meta-research

The DECI-2 PIs and mentors have regular reflections on their own processes and attempt to capture new knowledge through case studies and research reports. The majority of DECI-2 partnerships result in a case study, documenting the process, written by the mentors with input and comments from the partners (see Table 1). Most notably, the DECI-2 team came together for a workshop in Cape Town to understand how DECI-2 has been working and how to improve it. To prepare for the workshop, 5 out of the 6 mentors were involved in writing research reports on three aspects of DECI-2: capacity development of partners, capacity development of mentors and use of DECI-2 materials. In addition to this, the PIs meet with mentors face to face as much as is possible and regularly use Skype to stay in touch.

The research tends to focus on the processes involved in setting up and conducting DECI-2. Two topics in particular are dwelled upon significantly: the concept of readiness is much discussed and

seen as a key to unlocking a pertinent and useful process for the partner, and the integration of UFE and ResCom is a common returning theme.

The discussion of readiness seemed to be contained within the core team of DECI-2. While most mentors mentioned readiness in their interviews, it was rarely mentioned by partners. This also had implications for the communications of the DECI-2 research to the wider world, where general broadcasting was applied (new website) but rarely targeted communications to identified stakeholders, including other POs within IDRC.

In addition, our observation is that there is not much research conducted on the outcomes of the process. When asked specifically the team are able to articulate what they might expect as an outcome of the process – Tangibles include a useful evaluation with a targeted audience and targeted research communications that reach key audiences. Intangibles include engaging in critical thinking about their work and increased confidence. However, it was interesting that each respondent answered the question on outcomes in different ways and used different language. There did not seem to be a common understanding of the hoped-for outcomes – by which we mean what the partners would be doing differently as the mentoring progresses.

Regarding evidence and findings on outcomes, there were UFE reports that could be identified. However, when specifically looking for stakeholder maps created by the partners as a part of the research communication audience assessment these were not readily found. The two that were identified were relatively generic stakeholder maps; yet research communications is best applied to specifics. In response to this comment, the DECI team suggested the generalisation of the groups be considered a work in progress to specificity. In contrast with the UFE assignments mentors asked the partners to be very specific.

With the exception of one strong example of a strategic shift in communication from the ISIF partner in India, the respondents' data gave only examples of product orientated communication (improving a Powerpoint, advising on a press release or enhancing the branding of a network) rather than excitement and examples of policy influence or research take-up by the media. While the lack of examples is not unexpected, given that ResComs is a new component for DECI, and that the reality of research impact means that evidence of uptake or influence takes time to emerge, it would have been expected to at least hear stories of attempted influence, or incremental change that would have been documented in partners reports to IDRC.

5.4 What worked well?

This section explores features of DECI-2 which were mentioned by partners and mentors as particularly helpful.

5.4.1 For partners

Several areas emerged from interviews and document sources as being particularly helpful for and appreciated by partners, and important in producing the outcomes documented above. By far the most cited areas relate to the mentoring process itself rather than the products or methodologies which were conveyed to the partners.

The most cited area was **face to face visits**, with five out of ten interviewees mentioning this as the most appreciated part of the process and a number of other sources mentioning its importance in supporting partners. There was a sense that progress in mentoring is limited with virtual engagement alone and that a face to face visit can trigger breakthroughs in learning not otherwise possible. Explanations were offered by interviewees, and include: that mentor and mentee get to

know each other and build trust; mentors gain a better understanding of the context when they see the project in action and meet other people involved; and the partner having a longer and dedicated period of time to apply the DECI-2 process. On-site visits were particularly helpful for the grantee-level projects, which were much more specific and localised interventions. Face to face presentations given by the DECI-2 PIs were mentioned as helpful, particularly for partners' understanding of how DECI-2 works and what it aims to do.

The next most cited areas are to do with the practice of mentors. Partners appreciate both facilitative and advisory functions of mentors. Particularly mentioned was **the questioning and listening approach of mentors** and how they are available when needed. There was a strong appreciation for mentor's light touch-approach and gentle nudging to get the partner to question their choices and clarify their reasoning. This applies to the assigned mentors but also the DECI-2 PIs when they interacted directly with the partners.

Partners also appreciate when **mentors take a more active role** and offer advice, feedback and guidance. Several partners mentioned the importance of having the mentor as a sounding board for ideas, and others mentioned that tips and techniques from the mentors gave them confidence. Also important was the general momentum of mentors regularly checking in with partners and prompting them to action. The key role of DECI-2 was described by one partner as the pebble at the top of the avalanche, the initial stimulus for change rather than steady influence.

Partners appreciated the **opportunity to learn from other partners** going through the same process. The ISIF workshop in Brisbane was mentioned by all ISIF grantee partners as a pivotal moment in the mentoring. Likewise, Open Science mentioned meetings with ROER4D as very useful in getting the most from the UFE and ResCom processes, and which wouldn't have happened without their mutual participation in DECI-2. Others mentioned the value of meeting other DECI-2 participants at IDRC partners' meetings, to discuss their experiences and learn from each other.

Finally, partners appreciated **the UFE and ResCom approaches and the materials provided by DECI-2**, although mentions of these more concrete features were far less common than the *softer* features above. Partners liked that there was a systematic process to the ResCom approach rather than just a one-off event, and that it provided a common language for the team. For many partners, the UFE was the first experience of evaluation and it helped them see a more positive and useful view of evaluation. They found that the self-evaluation process made them more self-critical, mindful, and honest about presenting real findings no matter if they are positive or negative. They liked that hearing about the theory underpinning the approaches and found that presentations from mentors helped to scaffold the process. The guidance notes and other tools provided by mentors were appreciated when they were given deliberately with a specific need in mind.

5.4.2 For mentors

Mentors also mentioned several areas which they found particularly helpful to learn about DECI-2's approach, improve their professional practice and improve their support to partners.

The most commonly cited area was the **support from the DECI-2 principal investigators** and the culture that they instil in the team. Many of the mentors mentioned the regular conversations with the PIs, the example they set in leading the project and the sense that they are there learning with the mentors.

Secondly, they appreciate the **face to face visits with partners** as one of the most important parts of the process for mentors to build their understanding of partners' projects and to build relationships of trust with partners.

Thirdly they appreciate **learning from their colleagues** through the collaborative research papers and through teaming up on partner assignments. One mentor commented that the most useful part of the process was the *learning by doing* orientation of DECI-2.

5.5 What didn't work so well?

While the overarching sense from partners was very positive, when specifically asked, the partners mentioned several aspects of the experience which they found challenging. None of the issues discussed by partners were presented as negative, in that they didn't cause harm to the projects. Rather, they were presented as challenges which made it more difficult for the partners to engage with DECI-2. These are clustered under five broad areas: communication by the DECI-2 team, DECI-2's approach to mentoring, logistics of online meetings, implementing UFE and ResCom, and readiness problems.

The most common issue was to do with the **communication from DECI-2**. The majority of partners mentioned that it took some time to understand what they were getting involved in, and how the approaches applied to them. Some mentioned that DECI-2's initial introduction was not clear enough. One partner felt confusion among the DECI-2 team about who they were aiming at: specifically, whether a Westerner was seen as a legitimate participant. Another mentioned that there were times when they were confused about who was the primary mentor as they were spending as much time with the PIs as the regional mentor they were assigned. Finally, one partner felt confused when they were given templates from DECI-2 as it wasn't clear whether it was meant for the project's benefit or for DECI-2's research purposes.

There were aspects of the **mentoring approach** which mentors and partners have picked up on as less helpful. First, the process lacks structure, particularly at the beginning. One partner was regularly confused after calls with their mentor, expecting to have questions answered but ending up with more questions. Another expected direct advice about how to apply the steps and was surprised to be asked a series of questions instead of supplying an answer. Second, in some cases the contact person benefitted significantly more than the rest of the project/organisation. Third, the process was very time intensive, with one partner having to abandon the ResCom support because of lack of time, and another struggling to implement UFE because of the intensive engagement with users which is required. Finally, as reported by one of the partners, the webinars in particular were less helpful as they required a lot of work and the individual exercises were not immediately relevant to their work.

As with many projects relying on virtual communication there were **logistical and connectivity problems**. Partners mentioned that it was sometimes difficult to arrange meetings with mentors as schedules clashed, sometimes leading to long periods with no contact. Two partners mentioned that connectivity problems regularly prevented calls with mentors.

Partners also mentioned some problems **implementing UFE and ResCom**. Two partners mentioned that implementing findings in UFE was a challenge, one because they already had excessive reporting to IDRC and other evaluations which they had to respond to, and another that they had collected too much data and did not feel the process helped them understand what to do with it. One partner felt that the ResCom approach was too linear for their purposes and they developed their own version which was more iterative. Finally, one partner felt that there were insufficient guiding materials and that they had to make it up for themselves a lot of the time, e.g. how to write an evaluation question.

Two partners expressed **problems with the readiness assessment**. They felt that although they had been assessed as ready that perhaps they shouldn't have been. One partner said that their primary contact person was not engaged in the process and their lack of interest compromised their project's benefit from the process. Another said they started too soon and too quickly for the project as a whole to benefit, despite the contact person being very keen to learn. While these issues relate to organisational processes within the projects and outside of DECI's influence, it was felt that the readiness assessment could have picked up on potential difficulties such as these.

Overall the issues presented in this section were challenging for the partners but not critical. There were no cases reported where any of these issues, or any others not mentioned, prevented the partners from benefitting from DECI-2. The open, flexible process of DEC-2 made it possible to work around these challenges and learn from them.

5.6 External influencing factors

Partners and mentors mentioned several external factors which affected their experience of DECI-2, which are outside of the control of DECI-2, both factors which contributed to a positive mentoring experience and factors which inhibited engagement.

5.6.1 Contributing factors

- i. **Interest from mentees:** Perhaps not surprising, where there was interest to learn through DECI-2 there was generally a positive experience. The mentees have to carry a lot of the burden for additional work, meetings and convincing colleagues so if they are not especially interested or don't see the value of engaging with DECI-2 then they will not be motivated. It was also important for the mentee to open up their work to constructive criticism, and a desire to be inquisitive and reflective.
- ii. **Support from the funder:** Several people mentioned the importance of a supportive IDRC Programme Officer. Two partners in particular mentioned that support from their PO has been an important factor for them. Also important has been the encouragement from funders to include a suitable budget for evaluation and communication and capacity building for these.
- iii. **Project or organisation management:** Equally important as interested mentees and supportive funders is supportive management. When the principal investigator of the project was on board with DECI-2 then the process was generally more productive, with adequate financial and personnel resources committed. This is also not surprising and is already an important part of DECI-2's readiness criteria
- iv. **Experience of mentees:** Prior knowledge in their field (evaluation or communication) was seen as a contributing factor, but certainly not necessary. Many of the evaluators were completely new to evaluation and did not benefit any less from the process. Prior experience may speed up the process but doesn't necessarily improve it. A general research background was sufficient to grasp the particulars of the evaluation process taken by DECI. In addition, strong networks and thematic knowledge was seen as something beneficial for the evaluator.
- v. **Organisational factors:** There were different experiences of organisational factors which affect the mentoring. For one mentor, starting with a new project was easier than starting with an existing project as there was more opportunity to influence plans and habits in the

team. Another found it easier working with more established project which were not so much in flux. There were two comments about how an existing learning orientation helps DECI-2 to integrate with respect to UFE, and an existing desire for research update or policy influence help embed the ResCom component.

5.6.2 Inhibiting factors

- i. **Time available to mentees:** By far the most cited inhibiting factor was the lack of time for mentees to engage. The Memorandum of Understanding agreed between DECI-2 and partners doesn't specify the amount of time a partner commits to the mentoring process, although it does say that contact once per month is the minimum. Many partners start off the process not really knowing how much time it will take. In many cases DECI-2 was seen as a time intensive process and often the mentees were engaging with DECI-2 alongside their usual responsibilities which had not been reduced. There was a mixture of mentees who were working full time on their field (evaluation or ResCom) versus those which were also working on unrelated subjects. The latter were more difficult to keep engaged in the process. One mentee reported the time spent on DECI-2 had reduced the time working on core project activities. Despite this, many of the mentees reported that they remained appreciative of the meetings and made time for them.
- ii. **Staff turnover:** Another common problem reported by mentors was staff turnover, which caused delays in two projects and was one of the reasons two projects didn't proceed beyond the readiness stage. When a mentee is replaced, the project loses momentum, the mentor has to explain everything again and the new mentee has an even greater task to catch up. Staff changes also compromise application of evaluation findings and communication strategies, unless others are willing to take responsibility for them.
- iii. **Funders' actions:** As well as having a positive effect, funders can also have a negative effect, as was the case in a few of the projects. In one case the funder's insistence on a particular results framework interfered with the use-focus of DECI-2's approach. In two cases funders were commissioning evaluations alongside DECI-2 involvement and were kept quite separate. In another case, the funder did not give early advice on evaluation and communication budget, meaning by the time they were engaged with DECI-2 it was too late and they only had the resources for a *light* implementation. A general issue identified by mentors was the inconsistent allocation of resources to evaluation and communication activities in the partners' projects, and different attitudes to changing the budgets after engaging with DECI-2. A final issue relating to funders was mentioned by one partner, where their programme officer was not very cooperative in the UFE process and did not provide any feedback on reports.
- iv. **Organisation in flux:** Several of the projects came on board with DECI-2 soon after their own launch which meant that they were still trying to get to grips with themselves at the same time as trying to understand the application of UFE and ResComs. In one case the partner organisation grew from 4 to 17 people over the course of the mentoring. In this context it was hard for the mentors to maintain contact and keep momentum up. In another case, it was decided that the mentoring would not work because they had no spare capacity while in *start-up* mode.
- v. **Lack of interest:** As discussed above, mentoring works best when there is commitment to learning. Negative mentoring experiences are often put down to a lack of interest, either by

the mentee, the management or wider team. In one case the partner admitted that they appointed the wrong person to the role of mentee as they were not motivated for learning. Even when the mentee is enthusiastic, they will not have the desired effect if their managers are holding them back, or they are unable to motivate their colleagues to benefit from the process and adopt the tools.

5.7 Comparison with other initiatives

Building capacity of researchers is a common objective in IDRC programmes, as well as for other donors. This evaluation reviewed nine other initiatives with similar or overlapping objectives as DECI-2 and compared DECI-2's capacity building model with that of the others – five in detail and four in brief. The next section provides some figures with which to compare cost effectiveness of some of these initiatives.

Table 2 below shows a summary of the comparator initiatives. It can be seen that there are many variables to consider when comparing capacity building programmes – the size of the programme in terms of number of participants, the target entity (individual, project, organisation), the geographical scope, the kinds of capacities which are being supported, the means of building capacity, as well as other features which make the programmes distinct. All these variables mean it is difficult to make direct comparisons with DECI-2 as there is nothing quite like DECI-2 out there. In particular, DECI-2's meta-research approach sets it aside as unique, as well as its focus on working with network projects and grantees at the same time, and finally it's focus on evaluation and communication at the same time. Annex 4 gives a brief description of the programmes and their similarities and differences with DECI 2.

While many of the comparators use mentoring as their primary approach, the trend in more recent programmes has been to adopt a demand-led approach where participants (usually grantees) are asked to propose their own capacity building needs and initiatives to address these, rather than being offered by the donor to join an existing initiative.

Initiative	No. participants	Target participants	Geographical focus	Target capacities	Primary methods for capacity building	Other features
DECI-2	16	Network projects sub-projects	Africa, Asia, Latin America	Evaluation and communication	Mentoring	Included meta-research
TTI PEC	42	Research institutes	Global	Research communication	Mentoring	Developed toolkits
TTI ILAIP	12	Research institutes	Latin America	Demand led	Demand led	Managed by grantees themselves, through a network
CCAA	16	Research institutes	Africa	Outcome Mapping	Mentoring	Managed by IDRC
Ecohealth M&E	4	Research projects	Latin America and Africa	Monitoring and evaluation	Mentoring	
BECA	100	Individual researchers	Asia	Research	Workshops	Included network building

CBRM	28	Research institutes	Global	Resource mobilisation	Workshops and tailored advice	Managed by IDRC across all programs
SEARCH	7	Research projects	Global	Gender analysis	Workshops and tailored advice	Short term support
CARIAA	20+	Research institutes	Africa and Asia	Demand led	Demand led	Capacity building devolved to four research consortia
KSI	30+	Research institutes	Indonesia	Demand led	Demand led, networking	
KNOWFOR	3	Research institutes	Global	Design, monitoring, evaluation and learning	Tailored advice, mentoring	Provider is embedded in the programme from the start.

Table 2 Summary of comparators

Annex 4 also includes a brief view of online resource for researchers. These online sites tend to have a much broader audience and far less opportunity to directly influence them than DECI-2. Their strategies to support their audiences are very passive and one-directional compared with DECI-2. Nevertheless they have been considered in the comparison of capacity development approaches.

6 Evaluation Questions

This section answers each of the evaluation questions through reference to the findings presented above. Before unpacking this, we need to reiterate that any assessment of DECI (1 or 2) is in itself an exercise that must take into account complexity. DECI was designed to cater for real world complexity – that research is rarely a linear process, that capacity development is an interactive process relying on timing and feedback to maximise its effect, that communication in the modern world is complex and that disseminating research results rarely achieves the end goal of change, and that the human factor is key to working towards a defined purpose. So, when we approach the evaluation questions, we keep in mind ‘complexity’.

6.1 What have been DECI’s (1&2) key results, whether positive or negative, for grantees, the IN/NE program, and for wider audiences?

In section 5.3, the interviews and the secondary data indicate changes in the partners. Interviewees were able to articulate improved evaluation and communication approaches. They gained knowledge on evaluation and communication techniques, practiced more informed approaches to evaluation and communication and were able to build evaluation and communication into their way of working. They increased their understanding of their own practice. This involved regular reflection on their practice, questioning some of their assumptions and becoming aware of some of their blind spots. This praxis, reflection and action, is necessary in real world social research.

All of this has led to some evidence of improved delivery of objectives. There was evidence of improving the delivery of project or network activities, using data to inform decision making and developing more appropriate, relevant and targeted strategies. In addition to these outcomes, interviewees talked about developing stronger relationships, using evaluation findings to attract new funding and that DECI made reporting to IDRC easier.

Such evidence of outcomes is clear in some cases but not universal. This is why we feel the need to acknowledge complexity. DECI-2 was a flexible adaptive process that attempted to work with people in their own unique situation and context. Each of the partners had different research agendas, was made up of different people and operated in different contexts. The day of blueprint development has long passed, and DECI attempted to address this by making a bespoke service for the partners. With flexibility comes variability and the lack of standardisation makes it difficult to compare the mentoring experiences.

The evaluation has found that in some cases DECI-2 engagement with partners did not proceed beyond the readiness stage. In these cases, after initial meetings the process was dropped. There are no cases where significant investment of manpower was made by the DECI team only to result in nothing at the end of the process. The review does not cover DECI I in any detail. ISIF (DECI I partner) introduced two others potential partners but this cascade did not happen, the partners who were introduced were not able to engage in the DECI process due to human resource limitations. However, since that time ISIF has embedded DECI principles in its working practice and is working the DECI method into their new partnerships – and would welcome further mentoring support from DECI for its grantees.

From the wider perspective, the self-reported gains from the partners should work into clarity of evaluation and communication for the wider audience. However, within the scope of this study, and within the timeframe of DECI-2, it was not possible to gather evidence of impact on the NE programme as a whole.

The evaluators did not find any evidence of negative effects of participating in DECI-2 from those interviewed. As summarised in section 5.5, partners reported a number of elements of DECI-2 which did not work as well as other elements, and some reported that participating in DECI-2 was time-consuming, but these were reported as challenges rather than negative effects. Where partners lacked time to engage in DECI-2, the flexibility of the process allowed them to draw away and come back to the mentors when they were less busy. It is interesting to note, though, that the DECI-2 project documents, reports and research did not discuss the potential of negative effects, which may, to some extent, blind the mentors to such risks.

The key result is organisations which have self-reported evidence by anecdote of improved capacity undertaking utility focused evaluations and research communication. Their self-reported commentary is supported by observations of the programme implementers. As reviewers, we would feel able to say that the DECI process is helping organisations address culture and strategy, and even vision and conceptual models in some cases.

The focus on readiness and the apparent marginalisation of outcomes is potentially an imbalance that could weaken the impact of the programme as a whole. Mentors take their lead from the PIs, picking up on emphases and priorities, and partners will tend to pick up and focus on the emphases of the mentors. There is indeed a case (often quoted in psychology) for trusting the process, but with the development sector becoming increasingly concerned about value for money, there is a need to identify and document expected and unexpected outcomes.

There is a call for evidence based decision making within policy environments. The reality is that research ‘evidence’ is only one factor that influences policy adoption (or should we say evolution). Evidence is one component that allows issues to be reframed, other components including the external political environment, influence from the media, donor policies, even internal government processes such as internal planning and budgeting. For example, the evaluators are aware that recent research among municipalities in Uganda identified that the municipal accountant was the person holding up introduction of renewable energy to the town, and the research had to target that particular person convincing him that changes to the accounting system would be beneficial in the longer term.

Anecdotes and stories of research to policy influence, both successful and unsuccessful were not evident in the documentation we covered in this assessment. That is not to say that such stories do not exist or will not emerge as the programme enters its final year, nor that the complexity of policy influencing is not being covered by the mentors. Indeed, it was found in the RIA case that such outcomes took a decade to come to fruition. However as a whole DECI does not seem to emphasise a focus on outcomes, of what successful research communications looks like. DECI’s emerging ResCom approach could benefit from a module which focusses on monitoring incremental policy change – enabling partners to document tell-tale signs that change is happening, without having to wait for the decade-long, high-level changes.

6.2 How effective is the DECI-model compared to alternative capacity building models at IDRC?

The challenge in this question is to attempt to compare apples with apples – and preferably apples that taste similar (i.e. not ‘cooking’ apples with ‘eaters’). Section 5.7 attempts to present a brief overview of similar initiatives and extract the similarities of flavour between the programmes.

For instance, the Think Tank Initiative's Policy Engagement and Communications (PEC) programme has specific elements with similarity to DECI-2. Both were focused on providing mentors, both designed to go at the partners' pace, both targeting capacity for research communication, both generated support documents for the grantees. However, since the PEC was a sizeable programme with 42 compared to 16 partners, three managing contractors, a budget almost eight times that of DECI-2 and it only had a fifth of the time that DECI-2 had. PEC had to be much more intensive than DECI-2 in order to achieve similar capacity outcomes across more partners in less time. This changes the nature of the programme significantly and comparison of effectiveness remains difficult. Any statement is open to challenge. As the table 4.9 shows, a raw calculation of cost of programme per grantee, shows that the TTI PEC example above is an outlier, with most programmes coming within the bracket CAD10K to CAD30K per grantee.

The closest comparator is the CCAA M&E support project, with the same number of partners, a comparable budget, and similar time scales. The only major differences are that CCAA was managed directly by IDRC as opposed to an outside contractor, and it was targeting M&E capacity only, whereas DECI-2 had the added complication of also targeting communications capacity – although it could be argued that the Outcome Mapping approach taken by CCAA also aimed to support the partner's strategic influencing approaches, which resonates with DECI-2's ResCom component. The main challenges with CCAA were to do with it being managed in-house, although it was also commented that this meant the POs had more opportunity to learn. There was nothing found that suggested DECI-2 was any less effective than the CCAA project and it could be argued that DECI-2 has contributed more significantly to the field of capacity development though deeper reflection on the process.

Common characteristics of other initiatives include using mentoring and using demand led pots of money for grantees to plan their own capacity building. Programmes dominated by demand led models are still in their infancy and evidence of their long-term outcomes is not yet available. In 5.1 the outcomes of DECI-2 were summarised, and it was acknowledged that some partners were able to identify long term gains from the programme, while others less so. Other initiatives do not necessarily report on the outcomes in the same terms. However, it is possible to say that DECI-2 is at least on par with other successful initiatives and more successful than some others. Being small and focused DECI has the benefit of adaptability; other larger programmes can be less effective when faced with a greater spread of diversity among the partners. DECI also has been able to link partners and get them to undertake peer to peer networking.

DECI I was stated to research an alternative model from workshops. The hypothesis was that short workshops rarely gain the traction required for organisational change. To embed reflection and action, strategic decision making, communication consistency, was thought to needed more than an out of office experience but required day to day mentoring. We could not tell whether it is the influence of DECI in IDRC or the influence of key programme officers within IDRC, but the challenge to 'capacity building by short workshops' has taken root in IDRC. The other initiatives all have elements of capacity building beyond workshops. Thus, when trying to answer the question how effective is it compared to the alternatives, we would point to the wider changes in understanding in capacity building. These suggest that DECI is not an outlier, and suggest that lessons from DECI could be widely shared to stimulate the broader movement within development and research activities seeking to build capacity.

Finally, many of the comparators are programmes which are no longer running and in fact we find that DECI-2 is beginning to be an outlier among programmes currently running in IDRC. Capacity development has taken somewhat of a backseat in recent years as the funding portfolio of IDRC has

shifted towards higher capacity partners, and many of the large research programmes are co-funded with other donors. Whether capacity building has become harder to justify spending on, or whether the need among partners is actually less is uncertain, but we find it rarer these days for explicit capacity building projects. Instead, we find that capacity building is done by ‘stealth’ through collaborative research and opportunity funds, and this makes it complicated to compare with DECI-2.

6.2.1 What can be said about cost effectiveness?

It is not possible to undertake a cost benefit analysis within the time and scope of this study. Flexible bespoke processes such as using a mentor with a network or team, have not only direct benefits but imputed or indirect benefits. Placing a value on the degree of ‘praxis’ a team experiences and therefore on their engagement in adaptive research would be near on impossible, and certainly not practical within the time and resources of this study.

However, the approach we have taken therefore is to consider the top-level budget for some of the programmes analysed above. In a naïve analysis, we consider the number of participants, the years of support and therefore in the table below give a figure for cost per partner per year (in Canadian Dollars)

Initiative	Total budget (CAD)	Number of participants	Number of years providing support to participants (on average)	Cost per partner per year (CAD)
Think Tank Initiative PEC	3,123,790	42	1	74,376
Resource Mobilisation for Research (advisory support component)	1,055,063	28	1	37,681
DECI-2	740,474ⁱ	16ⁱⁱ	1.75	26,446
Think Tank Initiative ILLAIP	241,000	12	1	20,083
ECOHealth M&E	150,000	4	2	18,750
CCAA: Monitoring and Evaluation of Adaptive Capacity Relative to Climate Change	461,191	16	2.5	11,530
BECA - Building capacity for research and practice in ecosystem approaches to health in Southeast Asia	594,393	100	3	1,981

Table 3 Cost per partner for a range of capacity building initiatives. (notes: i. \$405,160 original funding + \$322,900 INASSA funding + \$12,414 from ISIF. ii. 6 network projects + 7 sub-projects or grantees + 3 projects which didn’t proceed beyond readiness stage)

As we can see, DECI is not an outlier. It sits among the middle of the alternatives. Each of these programmes has many benefits other than pure capacity building.

As described above, there are considerable similarities with the comparator projects, and considerable differences. These differences include the type of partner receiving the support, the focus of the programme, i.e. whether it is seeking to improve partnerships or the product, and the different weightings given to evaluation and Research Communication support. Comparison between these kinds of projects becomes difficult as there are few common, comparable factors. They are different scales (when dealing with more partners can benefit from economies of scale, but can also find that quality of mentoring falls with greater scale). Some are demand led, some are supply led. Some are integrated with research, some are separate. What they offer varies a lot –

facilitation vs training vs expert advice vs consultancy. Some include developing tailored tools/publications whilst some just use existing material.

In brief then, we note that DECI is of the same order of expenditure per partner per year as some of the other programmes. DECI has documented its contributions to its partners and mentors, and conducted and documented meta-research on the processes, which few of the comparators do. It also provides, for many of the partners, support in two areas (evaluation and communication) whereas most comparators are single topic areas. Elsewhere in the report we pick up on the lack of focus on outcomes (understood as changes in behaviour, actions or relationships of DECI-2's partners), but we have no reason to believe that DECI produces any less outcomes than any other approach.

6.3 What are the strengths and weaknesses of the DECI capacity development mentorship model?

DECI-2 has many elements of any participatory programme of development. The classic community development social mobilisation model relies on factors such as building relationships, allowing people to go at their own pace, not being afraid to walk away from communities that do not want to yet engage with change, identifying avenues for enhanced knowledge and creating a platform for sharing such knowledge. Reflection and action walking together. In Annex 5 we reflect more on the similarities between social mobilisation at the community level and elements of DECI-2. However, for this section, we see that the findings suggest that DECI-2 strengths lie in these participatory qualities.

The strengths of the programme include building relationships between mentor and mentee, allowing time, assessing readiness at the beginning, understanding context, focussing the exercise on the needs of the partner and their stakeholders, mentors being available as sounding boards as partners develop new areas. The implementers of DECI-2 focus on the role of 'readiness' as a key that unlocks the process. When comparing the programme to community social mobilisation literature, this focus is rarely mentioned. It is assumed that the reason communities have not taken initiative to change is based on resources and knowledge not a lack of commitment to change. This may be a key difference between community action and organisational change – it would be good for the DECI team to reflect on and discuss this.

For DECI-2 the research element proved a strength by creating a level playing field between the mentors and mentees in a co-learning relationship. Mentors were often learning new concepts from management and seeking how they might work them out with their partners. This made the mentors more approachable, encouraged the mentees to reflect, and made it less likely that the mentoring role slipped into a consultancy role – as was the case in several of the comparator programmes.

However, while this adaptation and evolution of thought had its benefits, it also sometimes brought confusion. A weakness of the programme was that it was not always clear if an exercise was for DECI benefit or intended to be for benefit of the partner. General understanding that DECI-2 is a research programme was not a problem as partners were comfortable, and in some cases motivated by that aspect of DECI-2. It was when mentors presented specific tools as part of the process, for example a template to define ResCom and UFE in one document, that they became unsure of the purpose of the exercise – whether DECI-2 was experimenting or whether they were suggesting a tried and tested tool for the benefit of the partner. People universally were not sure what they were getting in to; the objectives and benefit for the partners was not clear at the start. The initial introduction of

UFE/ResCom was confusing and took time to understand. The regional mentorship model did not work so well for global networks – they tended to appreciate the mentoring from Canadian mentors.

Each of these weaknesses is addressable if there were a DECI-3. Reflection on the work has produced documentation of insights, and clarification of what is being asked of the partner. Attempts have been made to summarise the process, and for the UFE process, there is a clear, published primer to which (potential) partners can refer and see more clearly what they are getting into. Clearer introductions would potentially eliminate many of the weaknesses mentioned above. However, it also potentially mitigates some of the strengths. The feeling partners had of journeying together with the mentor, learning as they were moving forward as equals might well be displaced by clearer documentation. It would be easy to slip into expert/learner mode.

External factors less easily mitigated by programme design include: interest from mentees, support from the funder, project or organisation management, experience of mentees, organisational factors, time available to mentees, staff turnover, funders' actions, organisation in flux, and lack of interest.

6.3.1 Of the model combined with the area of mentorship (UFE, Research Communications, and the UFE-ResCom hybrid)?

DECI-I focused on the role of UFE. The planning for DECI-2 noted the similarities between utilisation of a UFE and a more general research communication. They both held similar underlying principles. It has therefore been reasonable to expand the brief from UFE to include Research Communications. Many of the outcomes stated above (section 5.3) are actually about research planning and the iterative process of reflection and action while undertaking action research. One could therefore argue that the expansion of DECI I from UFE to DECI-2 to UFE/Res-Comm was based on seeing similar underlying principles, DECI-2 has been using the underlying principles of planning and iterative living reflection. An emphasis on actually defining a theory of change and identifying stakeholder to communicate to, is a challenge across all research programmes. Bundling UFE/ResCom is a useful hook by which to define what DECI-2 was doing. DECI-3 (if such a thing was to be proposed), could discuss widening the hook further to include strategic decision making about research and stakeholder engagement – although being mindful of diluting intentions so much that once again partners become unsure of what they are getting into. DECI-2 has a unique selling point at the moment of UFE/ResCom, diluting this to 'a mentorship programme that will help you strategize about your research' could become unattractive to partners.

Overall, the partners tended to appreciate the persistent presence and prompting of the mentors more than the specific tools or approaches that were introduced. The UFE and ResCom approaches provided a loose structure around which to engage partners in strategic reflection, and it is this that seems to have had the most effect with partners. The change in mind-set which has been observed in many of the partners – from being project-centric to focussing on the people they are engaging with – is a shift that is not unique to UFE and ResCom. There could be a case to say that DECI-2 could be just as successful with a different approach, as it is the mentoring style, the guiding principles and the people in the DECI-2 team that make a difference, not necessarily the approaches they use. The DECI team suggest that defining evaluation purposes is the 'game-changer' and it is the focus on a decision-making framework which makes it work. We do not subscribe to this view and find that it is the investment in relationships and time that support partners towards change. In Annex 5 we explore the similarities of the DECI model with community development in general and social mobilisation, neither of which are focus on utility but on the human interaction of question and answer.

6.4 For whom does the DECI mentorship model work well and in what circumstances?

DECI-2, like DECI-1, was designed to work with network research projects, that is research projects being implemented by a number of institutions, related through partnership or funding arrangements. The difference in partners for DECI-2 compared with DECI-1 is that many of the networks were global rather than regional, and DECI-2 worked directly with grantees or sub-projects of the networks as well as the network hubs. Another difference is that partners in DECI-2 included organisations with more of an advocacy-led approach than a research-led approach. In all cases DECI's primary entry point is project development rather than organisational development.

This evaluation finds that DECI-2 is effective at building evaluation and communication capacity at both network project level and sub-project or grantee level. The same overall approach of UFE and ResCom, as well as the mentoring model, has been shown to work well with large, distributed projects like Cyber Stewards and Open Science, and small-scale, localised projects like Condatos and the Cook Islands Maori database.

The readiness assessment stage is found to be one of the most important steps in ensuring DECI-2 is appropriate for the partners it is being introduced to. It looks at factors like management and donor buy in, allocation of staff and budget and interest of staff in learning, documenting and sharing with DECI-2 (8th Interim Technical Report). One description of the assessment also looked at the timing, flexibility and agility of the networks and projects and the stage of evolution of the network (A step by step process for networks & projects to verify & communicate change, presentation, DECI-2).

One factor which is missing from this list is the level of uncertainty faced by the projects and networks. Many of DECI-2's partners were facing new situations for which they had no blueprints, or unexpectedly had to change their strategies mid-way through the programme. For example, Nazdeek were in a situation where their primary stakeholder was not cooperative and had to rethink how to engage; CONDATOS was, for the first time, formalising its approach with explicit objectives; Cyber Stewards was realising that they had to invest more heavily in network building; and ROER4D was managing a shift from building a global network and developing visibility to knowledge generation and stakeholder engagement.

Projects with a much clearer strategy and confidence in how to implement it may not benefit significantly from DECI, certainly not to the extent that justifies the high level of participation. The DECI-2 team is aware of this aspect; one of the mentors described their role as accompanying a project as it changes gear, the DECI-2 principle investigators described DECI-2 as a process of supporting decision making, and their emerging principles include addressing complexity. However, the readiness assessment does not seem to consider this aspect directly. This is perhaps because all the partners had already been implicitly filtered by IDRC prior to being introduced to DECI-2, although this is unclear.

Interestingly, although DECI works primarily with projects, there are cases where support has shifted from the project level to the organisation level. For instance, with Privacy International, the initial project was to develop a network of partners in developing countries, but this strategy was quickly integrated into the core work of the organisation as they began to acknowledge the importance of an international network. DECI-2's support therefore was integral in helping the organisation to re-strategize. Likewise, with Justice Forum, because it was a small organisation, the project funded by Cyber Stewards was effectively core funding for them, and DECI-2 contributed to organisational wide strategies. These cases suggest that DECI's approach could be adapted to support organisational development as well as project development.

6.5 What can the DECI mentorship model learn from other capacity building approaches?

As touched on in 5.3.1, DECI-2 uses some basic principles to strengthen researchers ability to think about the audiences for their research, and revisit the purpose of their research. While this is the hook of UFE/ResCom, it touches on strategic review, change management, self-evaluation, and echoes any social mobilisation at community or organisational level. Should it therefore be called capacity building and compared with other initiative labelled as such or should we compare the principles underlying DECI-2? For instance, Outcome Mapping, as the guidance suggests (Earl et al, 2001), asks the facilitator to work with the community to develop their outcome indicators, to think about where they are moving towards and who they need to engage with to achieve that end. In that process the facilitator 'mentors' the community to think through what they are trying to achieve and gain the skills required to achieve it. Outcome Mapping exercises are rarely labelled as capacity building programmes, and yet they show the same characteristics of DECI-2.

Therefore, in trying to answer this evaluation question, we stumbled over what 'other capacity building approaches' can mean. The literature on capacity building seems to suggest that, while there is increasingly more experience being published, no one has cracked the 'how to do it'. The development community is on a continual learning journey. This was also reflected in comments from people involved in other capacity building work at IDRC, who suggested that there has been insufficient systematic learning across IDRC. DECI-2 has made some interesting contributions and insights to this work that can benefit the field.

One area that DECI-2 has yet to explore is a more demand-led approach to capacity development. DECI-2 is considered to be supply led because partners are invited to opt into a process which is largely pre-designed. While the support provided within a mentoring process is very much led by the needs of partners, the structure of the programme, choice of mentor, and the approaches of UFE and ResCom are all predetermined. Many of the comparator programmes have switched from a supply led capacity building approach to a demand led approach where partners are invited to submit proposals and if successful are granted funding to manage their own capacity development. For DECI, a shift like this may be unfeasible because the initial capacity of many of their partners is insufficient for them to even conceive how they could do things differently. It would radically change DECI as it would lose many of its defining features and would no longer be DECI. There may be ways in which some partners can have more of a steer on the capacity building approach. This may lead to some useful research in a future programme, looking at when, in the lifecycle of a capacity building process, the beneficiaries can take more control over the content and delivery of the capacity building efforts.

DECI-2 was mindful of the need to tailor the approach to the partner or network they were working with. There are examples where the mentoring was supported by Request for Proposal (RFP) training, revisiting and reflection on theory of change, even workshops and conferences – a tailored mixed methods approach. It will become important that this flexibility remains in any further incarnation of DECI. It has the potential to become shaped and formed into a '12 steps' programme that loses some of the spontaneity, adaptability, co-creation of learning outcomes and willingness to be a 'mixed method approach'.

As a research programme itself DECI has sought to capture a map of where it travelled. However, it could have a more rigorous approach to defining capacity. It could learn from Outcome Mapping about the ways to create a flexible progression of outcomes with expect, like and love to see changes – so that it could report more clearly on a journey through a capacity landscape. We have

noted in the findings commentary on gaining more knowledge about M&E approaches, or questioning assumptions. These could be more defined (preferably co-constructed with the partner) as desired capacity outcomes.

6.6 In what ways can the NE team and overall program/prospectus design improve support for a DECI-2-type mentorship process including attention to partner readiness and PO endorsement?

The readiness assessment seems to be working. There is perhaps a need to make it a little more systematic and transparent. This would address some of the weaknesses expressed as ‘not knowing what I was getting into’, ‘not sure what I signed up for’. Greater clarity would improve the early discussions with the partners.

One person spoke of an unsupportive PO, otherwise POs were reported as very supportive and engaging in the process. This was seen as important.

It has not been clear from our interviews and data, how DECI fits an overall IDRC NE strategy. We have seen that the NE team has other capacity building efforts but none as systematic and long-lasting as DECI. IDRC is known for the quality of its work, its flexibility as a donor, and its willingness to continually learn new approaches. As such we did not expect to find an explicit strategy document detailing how the NE programme approaches capacity building. POs are given flexibility to identify best approaches for their grantees. However, in this environment it is perhaps important for POs to ensure that their fellow POs are aware of the lessons learned and approaches taken. It seems also that DECI is not widely known outside the NE programme and might benefit from greater exposure within IDRC.

We note that the NE team is currently planning a capacity building initiative similar to DECI but for gender analysis. In seeking to learn from DECI we would advise caution that replication of the principles and structures may not replicate the results of DECI. Much depends on the personalities involved, and the skills of the mentors. Drawing on community mobilisation literature, as well as their technical skill, mentors need to have personalities that include flexibility, resourcefulness, resilience and ability to manage stress and change; a creativity and a drive for innovation and excellence. This includes realistic expectations that while change is possible, it cannot be imposed on people, and it takes time. Of course mentors should have sensitivity and respect for cultural, sexual, religious, ideological and ethnic diversity; and particularly working cross culturally they need to have excellent interpersonal and communication skills, including the ability to communicate and work with a wide range of people in a participatory and respectful manner. Mentors need to be approachable, good natured and responsive to people’s needs, and therefore able to enhance effective work relationships. These traits need to be at the core of the person, and balanced with appropriate technical skills and commitment to the vision.

Certainly a new programme would benefit from close collaboration and learning between the two as there is still much to learn. However, gender analysis is arguably more nuanced and requires consultant with specific technical skills with the challenge to watch for a shift in the role of the mentor from enabling learning to teaching or even doing on behalf of partners.

This evaluation question raises the question of readiness and causes us to ask - What is available for other partners which are not ready for DECI? This is where a mixed method approach is important. The NE team could create a menu of options— knowledge cafes, networking events, full DECI with sufficient description for research networks and partners to identify their starting point.

6.7 To what extent is the combination of project objectives (research & innovation, capacity development for regional mentors, mentoring to NE partners) worth maintaining in a future phase?

The research orientation is useful as it sets DECI apart from a service delivery project. Researchers appreciate research and appreciate being part of an open process. However, there is some tension between doing the research and supporting the partners. We have discussed above the lack of clarity that some partners had when embarking on the process. On the other hand, presenting a defined 'process' that leaves minimal room for adaptation to specific circumstances could be off putting to some partners while giving others a sense of security. The balance between an evolving action research programme, and a service delivery of a 'product' is one challenge. There also needs, regardless of process, to be clearer boundaries when these two objectives are not aligned (e.g. asking partners to test a template, interviewing partners).

A future iteration of DECI might consider which parts of the model have been proven, or at least on which part significant evidence has been gathered and confidence gained about what works for who and how. These parts might then be graduated out of the research incubator and implemented as a standard model (with all the appropriate adaptation and flexibility needed from any capacity building effort). This will not only free up resources to focus research on other aspects but it will also clarify to partners which parts of the process are being researched and which are not. E.g., the adaptation of UFE from DECI-1 to DECI-2 seems to have worked well, as does the refinements to readiness. What is still in question is the integration of ResCom, which needs further cases to refine the model, and the regional mentor model, which completely proven itself in the scale up from DECI-1 to DECI-2.

The regional mentoring model follows all the good practice guidance about providers being from the same context as the recipients of capacity support. However, there is room to challenge the appropriateness of the regional mentoring model in providing support to global networks. In the context of global networks, this isn't always a relevant issue as the mentees may be in one region but from another region, or the hub may be in a different region from where the research is taking place. Secondly, with just two mentors in a region, it's unlikely that they will be in the same country as the partners so they may not even share the same context anyway – e.g. an Indonesian mentor in India, or an Indian mentor in Cook Islands. In Latin America the countries are much closer so it works well. When communication is largely electronic and in one language anyway, it doesn't really matter where the mentor is: Partners across the world appreciated the support from the Canadian mentors.

It is important to note that DECI-2's objectives went beyond supporting individual research projects and networks; they also aim to build capacity among regional evaluation and communication consultants such that the kind of support DECI-2 provides can continue in some way after the programme has ended. In this context, a regional mentoring model is important to consider, even if might be more effective to provide the support to partners using international consultants. However, given that one goal (capacity building of regional mentors) has the potential to limit the achievement of another goal (capacity building of project partners), there has to be a very clear rationale for pursuing this goal. If there is a DECI-3 the tensions between these objectives should be explicitly worked out through a more comprehensive theory of change for the programme. One question we ourselves are left with is whether an increasing pool of individual consultants actually strengthens the system, or whether there should be companies or networks commissioned such that they have a deeper learning between each mentor.

The key issues to consider here are:- The importance of budgeting for at least one face to face meeting at an absolute minimum; the importance of good digital connections – often out of the control of the participants. If the mentor is in a country with poor connectivity it may be better to have a mentor with better connectivity to get frequent and rapid responses. The importance of the mentor understanding the question answer process – a mentor living in the same country who has not inculcated the joint learning approach and who considers themselves an expert with a repository of insight, is better substituted with a mentor who understands the processes. The importance of a mentor who does understand culture, but is not necessarily of the same culture (the Canadians are appreciated because they are sensitive to culture, among other positive attributes).

Considering the future, mentoring to NE projects is still very relevant. They are usually small teams, with little existing generalised evaluation and research communication capacity. The focus on UFE seems a good hook on which to hang the wider reflection process, and its integration into research communications could more explicitly include Theory of Change and mapping of desired research (and policy) outcomes².

Integration of UFE and Res-comms makes sense, and effectively has four options: don't integrate (hook a strategic reflection process on something else), make Research Communications the subject of evaluation, make evaluation the subject of Communications, integrate both ways (either evaluate the communication of the evaluation or communicate the evaluation of the communication). Given that we cannot imagine a situation when one would not communicate findings of an evaluation, or when one would not want to evaluate a communication effort, the decision is about how much effort to take and how strategic it needs to be. One will take the lead but the other will crop up at some point in the conversation. To what extent the other takes over is part of the mentor's role. In some cases evaluation and communication were running in parallel, with separate contact points and separate mentors – in these cases, each mentor has to be attentive to the opportunities for integration while maintaining clarity over the scope of their support.

In reality, the integration could be too much to take on board and only considered if good progress has already been made and there is a clear case to proceed. The projects where integration has worked well are the ones where there are very specific intersections. E.g., including key evaluation questions on the efficacy of communication strategies. In practice, one of the two disciplines will come first and the other will be introduced to support it. If evaluation comes first then research communications is introduced to provide a systematic approach to supporting use of findings. If communications comes first then evaluation is introduced to provide a systematic way to learn whether the communications is working as expected.

There are also more convoluted integrations of the two which demonstrate the synergy. E.g., a research institute creates engaging infographics of data about research uptake to help researchers understand their impact – this is an example of communication of evaluation of communication. Another example is of an evaluator assessing the extent of the influence of their evaluation findings – an example of evaluating the communication of an evaluation.

What is clear is that integration from the outset should not be the objective as introducing a combined framework is too much for a partner to take in. Mentoring should always start with either

² When we mention Outcome Mapping or mapping of research outcomes, we mean the core principles of the Outcome Mapping process as defined by IDRC, not the 12 step tools per se. The principles of identifying the stakeholders, their interest in the outcomes, and the possibilities of multi-layered expectations (expect, like and love to see). This is well embedded in the RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach, which the DECI team is familiar with.

evaluation or communication and, depending on interest and capacity of the partner, build in the other over time. This includes in cases where evaluation and communication are being mentored in parallel.

7 Conclusions

DECI works and is an effective model, comparable with other models of capacity development found in IDRC and the programmes of other donors.

The key takeaway is that the team needs more confidence in their approach and should be stronger in advocating for it. They have a good product – market it. This refers to the mentoring approach and the UFE and ResCom content.

The crux of the value that is added is not the UFE or ResCom capacity per se but it is the critical thinking that is embodied with the DECI approach. Participants across the board have benefitted from questioning the way they do things – not just by improving what they do to better achieve their objectives but also by building in this reflective way of working into their approach so they continue to benefit.

However, from our interviews it was clear that few if any of the partners expected the intense strategic reflection which DECI provides- most thought it would be more surface level capacity building. It is therefore difficult to know whether to recommend that any consideration of DECI-3 be rebranded as a very long mentored ‘strategic reflection’ exercise or whether the focus on a tangible output such as UFE continue as the bait for such.

Given the redefining of DECI-2 as mainly an outcome of embedding strategic reflection, we can then question whether UFE and ResCom should be the only ‘issues’ discussed. If it is the process of mentoring, and indeed a questioning, animating, co-learning mentor, which is important then what is it about DECI that provides value to the mentees? Would the partner outcomes be different if they worked with a different approach other than UFE and ResCom? Eg. Outcome Mapping (which can be used for both). Do mentors need to have expertise in the particular UFE and ResCom approaches? Perhaps it’s just the process of mentoring that matters and the particular structure that it works around isn’t significant, as long as there is a structure. This needs to be explicit in recruitment of mentors. It is important to note, however, that a common approach across DECI has certainly helped the mentors to support each other and create a common identity that contributes to the momentum of the programme and value to the mentors (who in many cases spend much more time than they are contracted for). The experience of other programmes suggests when mentors bring in different approaches then the cohesion of the programme is less and mentors learn less from each other.

DECI-2 is good for projects facing uncertainty, adapting their strategies, going into new territory etc. It may have less applicability for projects rolling out a blueprint. Arguably all projects in development are the former. However, perhaps the question is more about the space for innovation both within the attitude of the people running the project and the support provided by donors and boards. Readiness should assess the extent to which projects are facing uncertainty and the appetite for adaptive management among those responsible.

Should DECI-3 still be research? The value of a research orientation isn’t the research per se but the adaptive management approach which stimulates frequent reflection and learning, the questioning of partners and the coming alongside partners to learn together rather than as experts building their capacity. We have called for greater clarity during the introduction to partners, to show the boundaries of which elements are now proven and which might be experimental. It is important the partner knows what they signing up for.

There is perhaps an issue with language: is capacity building the most appropriate way of describing what DECI does? Is evaluation the most appropriate word to describe the UFE part of DECI – it's as much monitoring as evaluation, and the kind of evaluation supported through UFE is very different to many people's experience of evaluation which tends to be grander in scale and ambition, driven by external stakeholders and often of less-immediate value to the project. This speaks to the need for greater clarity in the introduction of DECI to any participating partner. There is a very difficult balancing act required – construction of a 'Toolkit' could signal a single process or method that would be competing in a crowded market. Yet at the same time, confident marketing of the proposition is also required to ensure that networks that might benefit from the approach enter into discussion about the approach.

Having started this section on two positive statements, there are the inevitable caveats. The research component has been useful but has also caused confusion. The team could draw a line under what has been learned so far and move parts of the project out of the incubator of the research environment and treat it as proven. The incubator can then be used to test parts of the approach which are still unproven or to bring in new elements to experiment with. The division between what is being tested vs. what is ready for implementation should be made explicit for all involved.

This would enable greater clarity in the initial introduction to DECI which has been confusing for many people, both in terms of understanding the content of DECI (which is acknowledged to take some time to comprehend) and in terms of understanding the process or approach of DECI. DECI-3 would benefit from an explicit theory of change with a focus on behavioural outcomes and indicators of outcomes as part of its planning process. Clearer objectives or expectations, with perhaps differentiation of expect to see, like to see and love to see, and greater definition of which elements are experimental and which are proven (and perhaps to state to what degree they are proven) would help people understand what is involved. A suggestion rather than recommendation is that any planning for DECI-3 looks at the plan through the lens of social mobilisation.

The idea of mentors is certainly a viable alternative to 'workshops'. However, the skill of the mentor in being a questioner and co-learner is vital. As DECI considers the future it will be tempting to think that mentors know what they are doing and for them to rely on a sequence of tools rather than trusting the process of questioning. The eye should always be kept on creating a legacy of adaptive reflection and action. In terms of DECI-2, we note a limited acknowledgement and emphasis on the personality and facilitating skill of the mentor, something that could be strengthened in DECI-3. Mentors also need to remain conscious of the power balance between them as 'connected' to the donor, and they as facilitators enabling reflection and empowerment.

The regional mentor model has not worked everywhere. It works where the mentor speaks the (non-English) language of the mentees (e.g. Latin America), where the mentor is known in the networks of the mentees (e.g. in Latin America) and where the geographical distance between the mentor and mentee makes field visits cheaper and easier (e.g. Asia). However, due to the global nature of many of the networks it ended up not being an important factor – particularly with the projects assigned to the East African mentors. Any future programme should assess and recruit mentors not based on their location but on their skill set. Language is of course important, but even an outsider can adapt to the local culture and can therefore be from any location.

There were cases where the contracted mentor did not have enough work to give sustained attention to DECI-2. Their other consulting work often took precedence, further reducing their availability for DECI-2 and their ability to participate in the research. By choosing mentors not by

location but by skill set, they might be given more work and thereby DECI might command their attention.

The exception to this is the case where DECI continues to prioritise the objective of building regional mentoring capacity. Here the criteria should also take into consideration where the mentor is based and who they might be able to support independently. However, this should be accompanied with a clearer theory of change of how individual mentors can make a difference beyond DECI, defining the intended outcomes as behaviour change within their boundary partners and disaggregated for expect, like and love to see categories might be helpful to both mentors and partners.

The readiness assessment should take into account personality of the mentors and mentees to determine if this kind of mentoring relationship will work. Readiness isn't just about whether the partner is ready to engage in the process but (i) what kind of process is going to be beneficial? (ii) how will it be beneficial? DECI mentoring is an intensive process which works well for helping projects through particular kinds of issues, as is the UFE and ResCom packages. Establishing a strong enough case to justify the investment is important.

Finally, we have included an annex on comparing DECI to a village level community mobilisation. This was not an exhaustive comparison but we wished to illustrate a few similarities. Based on that simple comparison, we believe that DECI-3 would benefit from collation and collection of relevant literature from that domain of social mobilisation, in order to recruit and support mentors in their understanding of mobilisation processes. This would enable them to refer to a toolkit of lessons learned to enhance and strengthen their ability to 'animate' their mentees.

8 References

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Annex 1: Interviews

Name (s)	Type	Date	Mode
Ricardo Ramierez, Dal Broadhead and Wendy Quarry	DECI	23-Aug	Group
Julie La France	IDRC Comparator	24-Aug	Face to face
Zee Leung	IDRC Comparator	24-Aug	Face to face
Heidi Braun	IDRC Comparator	24-Aug	Face to face
Qamar Mahmood	IDRC Comparator	24-Aug	Face to face
Ricardo Ramierez and Dal Broadhead	DECI	24-Aug	Group
Andrés Sanchez	IDRC Comparator	25-Aug	Face to face
Matthew Smith	IDRC staff	25-Aug	Face to face
Nicole Generoux	IDRC Comparator	01-Sep	Phone
Joaquin Navas	DECI	19-Sep	Skype
Charles Dhewa	DECI	19-Sep	Skype
Julius Nyangaga	DECI	20-Sep	Skype
Sonal Zaveri	DECI	20-Sep	Skype
Vira Ramelan	DECI	22-Sep	Skype
Wendy Quarry	DECI	22-Sep	Skype
Maureen Hilyard	Partner	27-Sep	Email
Sylvia Cadena	Partner	28-Sep	Skype
Masashi Nishihata	Partner	28-Sep	Skype
Jacqueline Chen	Partner	28-Sep	Skype
Blaine Harvey	IDRC Comparator	29-Sep	Skype
Guy Jobbins	IDRC Comparator	29-Sep	Skype
Ajoy Datta	Comparator	30-Sep	Face to face
Peter Taylor	IDRC Comparator	30-Sep	Skype
Kharisma Nugroho	Comparator	30-Sep	Skype
Kaia Ambrose	IDRC Comparator	03-Oct	Skype
Jess Dart	Comparator	04-Oct	Skype
Megal Lloyd Laney	IDRC Comparator	05-Oct	Skype
Becky Hillyer	Partner	05-Oct	Skype
Sukaina Walji	Partner	07-Oct	Skype
Jan Van Ongevalle	IDRC Comparator	10-Oct	Skype
Clara Usiskin	Partner	10-Oct	Skype
Sarah Goodier	Partner	12-Oct	Skype
Vanessa Wyrauch	IDRC Comparator	13-Oct	Skype
Gus Hosein	Partner	14-Oct	Face to face
Ricardo Ramierez	DECI	19-Oct	Skype
Phet Sayo	IDRC staff	19-Oct	Skype
Jennie Phillips	Partner	19-Oct	Skype
Dal Broadhead	DECI	21-Oct	Skype
Trish Wind	IDRC staff	21-Oct	Skype

Annex 2: List of documents reviewed

Title	Publication date	Type	Source
1st. Interim Technical Report July 2012 – February 2013	02/13	Project report	DECI
2nd. Interim Technical Report March 2013 – August 2013	08/13	Project report	DECI
3rd. Interim Technical Report August 2013 – January 2014	01/14	Project report	DECI
4th. Interim Technical Report January-July 2014	07/14	Project report	DECI
5th. Interim Technical Report August 2014 – January 2015	01/15	Project report	DECI
6th. Interim Technical Report January 2015 – July 2015	07/15	Project report	DECI
7th. Interim Technical Report August 2015 – January 2016	01/16	Project report	DECI
8th. Interim Technical Report February 2016 – July 2016	07/16	Project report	DECI
Mentoring the CITIZENLAB & Cyber Stewards Project in evaluation and research communication	07/16	DECI-2 case study (draft)	DECI
Mentoring three ISIF-funded projects in evaluation and research communication	05/16	DECI-2 case study (draft)	DECI
Developing Evaluation & Communication Capacity in Information Society Research (DECI-2)	05/12	Project proposal	DECI
A Project Decision-Making Framework	nd	Presentation	DECI
Can participatory communication be taught? Finding your inner phronēsis	07/05	Journal article	DECI Website
Building capacity among regional evaluation and communication consultants	04/16	Research paper	DECI Website
Learning our way into Utilization-focused evaluation: the DECI experience	03/14	Conference paper	DECI Website
Learning with and Using Deci Materials: Lessons Learned	05/16	Research paper	DECI Website
Capacity gains in Utilization Focussed Evaluation and Research Communication: learning with the mentees	05/16	Research paper	DECI Website
Utilization Focused Developmental Evaluation: Learning Through Practice	07/05	Journal article	DECI Website
Readiness & Mentoring: two touchstones for capacity development in evaluation	03/14	Conference paper	DECI Website
Workshop Report: DECI-2 Team Meeting	05/16	Project report	DECI Website
Developing Evaluation Capacity in ICTD (DECI): Final Technical Report	04/12	Project report	DECI Website
Case study: SIRCA: Building Evaluation Capacity — A Review of Awarding, Mentoring and Conferences	nd	DECI Case study	DECI Website
Case Study: PAN Asian Collaboration for Evidence-based e-Health Adoption and Application (PANACeA)	nd	DECI Case study	DECI Website

Case Study: DREAM-IT — Development Research to Empower All Mongolians through Information Communications Technology in Mongolia	nd	DECI Case study	DECI Website
CASE STUDY: ISIF — The Information Society Innovation Fund (ISIF)	nd	DECI Case study	DECI Website
CASE STUDY: Developing evaluation capacity (DECI) — Building an Organization's Capacity to Conduct Use Focused Evaluations using a Mentoring Approach LIRNEasia's CPRsouth Program	nd	DECI Case study	DECI Website
Evaluating CONDATOS: A web-based U-FE experience that beat the odds	nd	DECI-2 Case study	DECI Website
THE EVALUATION OF RESEARCH ICT-AFRICA (RIA) A CASE STUDY	09/14	DECI-2 Case study	DECI Website
Privacy International's utilisation of DECI-2 UFE	nd	Partner reflection	DECI Website
DECI-2 – Escuela de Administración, Finanzas e Instituto Tecnológico (EAFIT) Meeting notes	09/16	Project memo	DECI
Mentoring Privacy International in evaluation and research communication	09/16	DECI-2 case study (draft)	DECI
Mentoring the “Research on Open Education Resources for Development” Project in Evaluation and Research Communication	09/16	DECI-2 case study (draft)	DECI
Communication Strategy, Privacy International	09/14	Partner output	DECI
Research Communication Strategy V2, ROER4D	05/15	Partner output	DECI
Monitoring & Evaluation in Ecohealth Projects: Managing Change, Coping with Complexity	12/10	Comparator report	IDRC
Policy Engagement and Communications Programme Africa, South Asia, Latin America: Global Synthesis Report	09/14	Comparator report	IDRC
Project Completion Report: Global Think Tank Initiative Policy Engagement and Communications Program	11/14	Comparator report	IDRC
Capacity Development within the Think Tank Initiative, Final Report	09/14	Comparator report	TTI website
Looking for Answers External Evaluation of IDRC's EcoEID Initiative in SE Asia – China	nd	Comparator report	IDRC
Project Completion Report: Building capacity for research and practice in ecosystem approaches to health in Southeast Asia	nd	Comparator report	IDRC
Project Completion Report: Monitoring and Evaluation of Adaptive Capacity Relative to Climate Change	02/10	Comparator report	IDRC
Final Evaluation of the IDRC/DFID Climate Change Adaptation in Africa Programme	05/12	Comparator report	IDRC
Final Report of the IDRC/DFID Climate Change Adaptation in Africa Programme	06/12	Comparator report	IDRC
Cross-Country Report – Gender Considerations within IDRC SEARCH Grants	nd	Comparator report	IDRC
IDRC Gender Consultancy Final Report	05/16	Comparator report	IDRC

Consultancy team reflections and suggestions to IDRC to ensure the effective inclusion of gender considerations within SEARCH projects and interventions	nd	Comparator report	IDRC
Resource Mobilization for Research: What we've learned	2016	Comparator report	IDRC
Evaluation of the IDRC Project on Capacity Building in Resource Mobilization	11/09	Comparator report	IDRC
What We're Learning: Perspectives from a Resource Mobilisation for Research Programme	09/15	Comparator report	IDRC
Beyond Fundraising: Building sustainability by investing in organizational strengthening	nd	Comparator report	IDRC
Strengthening Capacity of ILAIPP and its members	nd	Comparator report	TTI website
Project Approval Document: Strengthening Capacities of the Latin American Initiative for Public Policy Research and its Members	06/15	Comparator report	IDRC

Annex 3: Summary of progress with partners

A brief introduction to each partner and a summary of the engagement with DECI-2 is provided below.

1. Cyber Stewards

Cyber Stewards is an IDRC-funded global network launched in 2012 by Citizen Lab, a research group based at University of Toronto. It provides support to cyber security scholars, advocates and practitioners of the global South in order to help them articulate a vision of cyber security in which rights and openness are protected on the basis of shared research and empirical knowledge. (Navas et al, 2016).

The initial offer was to work with Cyber Steward partners in the global South but the agreement was made to work first at the network hub level before engaging with partners. DECI-2 started working with Citizen Lab in November 2012, and by early 2013 DECI-2 had assigned UFE and ResCom mentors from the LAC region and Citizen Lab had assigned contact people for each. Because Citizen Lab was at the very early stages of building the Cyber Stewards network, the UFE and ResCom mentoring focussed on helping them to understand the emerging network and how best to support its development. The UFE progressed very quickly because the Citizen Lab UFE contact point was a PhD candidate whose research aligned closely with the UFE scope, and resulted in a completed evaluation. The ResCom mentoring was more ad hoc and didn't progress as far because of lack of time on the Citizen Lab side.

2. Asociación de Derechos Civiles (ADC)

ADC is an Argentinian NGO that seeks to contribute to establish a judicial and institutional culture that would guarantee the fundamental rights of people based on the values of the national constitution (Navas, 2016). ADC is a member of Cyber Stewards and were invited to participate in DECI-2 during one of the network meetings. They had recently created the Freedom of Expression and Privacy unit and saw the support from DECI-2 as a good opportunity to be more strategic about who and how they would communicate to influence public policy on digital rights. They were interested in DECI-2's approach of combining communications with UFE and thought it would help them take a strategic learning approach. DECI-2 assigned a Latin America based mentor in early 2016 and they decided to focus on developing a communications plan and setting up a developmental evaluation approach to improve the plan on an on-going basis.

3. Justice Forum

Justice Forum is a grantee of the Cyber Stewards project based in the UK. They received a grant for a pilot project investigating the psychosocial effects of digital surveillance on human rights activists. The research is being conducted by a team of two: a human rights lawyer and a psychologist. They were introduced to DECI-2 through Cyber Stewards and signed up to the process to explore communication options and develop a communication strategy beyond just an academic paper which was initially the only expected output. Mentoring started in early 2016, with DECI-2 assigning a Canadian based mentor to work with one of two researchers, and is ongoing at the time of writing. The support has so far focussed on developing a strategic approach to communicating the findings of the research.

4. Protecting Privacy in an Increasingly Digital Developing World

Privacy International (PI) is an NGO based in the UK working to defend and promote the right to privacy across the world. It was founded in 1990, registered as a non-profit in 2002 and formalised with its own office in 2011. Through a grant from IDRC it established the Protecting Privacy in an Increasingly Digital Developing World project which supports 20 privacy organisations around the world. PI was introduced to DECI-2 at an IDRC partners meeting in December 2012, at a time when the organisation was only 4 members of staff but soon to double in size. There was initial interest for support with evaluation, more so than communication as that was seen as an existing strength, given the advocacy experience of the organisation.

Because PI was going through a time of growth it wasn't until late 2013 when mentoring with DECI-2 started. It was expected that mentoring would be provided by the East Africa based mentors, and predominantly aimed at PI's partners, but after initial meetings it was agreed that mentoring would start with the UK-based hub, and would be better served by DECI-2's Canadian-based mentors. Mentoring in both UFE and communications continued until early 2015. The UFE process was focussed on helping PI understand and value its relationship with its global partners and supported key strategic decision which has shaped PI's work in this area. The communications work was limited due to lack of budget and the fact that it was a tumultuous time for the organisation – setting up big advocacy campaigns following the revelations disclosed by Edward Snowden. Nonetheless the mentoring continued for a year and resulted in an audience-centred communications strategy.

5. Research on Open Educational Resources for Development (ROER4D)

ROER4D is a project based at the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT) at the University of Cape Town and aims to improve educational policy, practice, and research in developing countries by better understanding the use and impact of Open Educational Resources (OER). It is comprised of 18 sub-projects spread over a number of countries in South America, Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia and has a staff of seven people. ROER4D were introduced to DECI-2 by IDRC who co-funds the project. After a series of meeting throughout 2013, including a face-to-face workshop in Cape Town in October 2013, there was an agreement for ROER4D to take part in DECI-2 but to delay until the project had been set up sufficiently and had hired staff which could act as contact points.

By early 2014, ROER4D had assigned contact points for communication and evaluation and DECI-2 had matched them with the two East Africa based mentors, and apart from a change in evaluation contact person half way through, the mentoring proceeded until mid-2016. Evaluation mentoring has focussed on supporting ROER4D's project objectives of Research Capacity Building, Networking, and Communication, while communication mentoring has focussed initially on project visibility and networking and subsequently on knowledge generation. There has been a close integration of the evaluation and communication work throughout the process.

6. The Open and Collaborative Science in Development Network (OCSDNet)

OCSDNet is a project funded by IDRC and DFID which comprises 12 research teams interested in understanding the role of openness and collaboration in science as a transformative tool for development thinking and practice. The project is coordinated by the University of Toronto and iHub, Nairobi and has staff in Canada, US, Kenya and South Africa. The project was introduced to DECI-2 by IDRC in 2015 and initial discussions were held with project staff based at iHub, Kenya. It took some time to come to an agreement for mentoring, but eventually the M&E coordinator, based at the University of Stellenbosch was assigned as the contact point, and the East African evaluation

mentor was assigned by DECI-2. Because of insufficient funds allocated in the OCSDNet budget the project could not engage in a full mentoring process. Mentoring commenced in early 2016 and continues to support the development of a project-wide M&E system which is use-focussed, and planning an upcoming mid-term evaluation. Communication mentoring has not progressed as far as evaluation due to the resource limitations mentioned above.

7. Information Society Innovation Fund Asia (ISIF)

ISIF is a grants and awards programme managed by Asia-Pacific Network Information Centre, aiming to stimulate creative solutions to ICT development needs in the Asia Pacific region. ISIF was one of the participants of DECI-1 and benefitted from UFE mentoring from 2009 to 2011. ISIF invited DECI-2 to partner again, this time to mentor a selection of their grantees in the Asia & Pacific region in both evaluation and communication.

ISIF and DECI-2 invited 12 grantees of the 2014-15 ISIF funding programme to submit expressions of interest to participate in mentoring. Three organisations were selected after assessment of their readiness: Operation Asha in Cambodia, Nazdeek in India and the Cook Islands Maori Database in the Cook Islands.

a. Operation ASHA (OpAsha)

OpAsha is an NGO with a presence in India and Cambodia that provides tuberculosis (TB) care to the most disadvantaged populations. With a grant from ISIF, OpAsha developed a mobile application to assist with detection of TB in Cambodia and identify hotspots to prevent outbreaks. DECI-2 Asia-based mentors provided evaluation mentoring to help OpAsha measure the impact of the mobile app on detection rates, and communication mentoring to help OpAsha use the results of the evaluation to influence the Government of Cambodia and potential donor to support continued development and scale up of the technology. Mentoring took place over 18 months, mostly via Skype, but also through two webinars and a site visit from the mentors.

b. Nazdeek

Nazdeek is a legal empowerment organisation committed to bringing access to justice for marginalized communities in India. From 2013 to 2015 Nazdeek partnered with Pahdra, a local activist organisation to support legal literacy of Pajhra staff, particularly to address the growing problem of violations of workers' rights in tea plantations in Assam, which is resulting in high rates of maternal and infant mortality among the indigenous 'Adivasi' community. With a grant from ISIF, Nazdeek partnered with the International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination (ICAAD), to build a SMS mobile and mapping platform to document cases of health rights violations and build an evidence base. Mentoring from DECI-2 Asia-based mentors focussed on supporting an evaluation of the technology, particularly to understand how it was facilitating greater community engagement and reporting of rights violations. In addition, communication mentoring focussed on the development of a strategic approach to using the evidence collected through the technology to engage the tea plantation owners and local government actors to address the rights violations.

c. Cook Islands Maori Database

The Cook Islands Internet Action Group is an NGO which advocates for the application of ICTs to address development issues in the Cook Islands. In 2013 they received a grant from ISIF to develop the Cook Islands Maori Database, an online dictionary of more than 15000 Cook Island Maori words. The aim is to highlight the plight of the language, which is on the UNESCO endangered languages list, and assist in starting a discussion on the future of these languages and to build a community of users

who are passionate about the language. DECI-2 provided mentoring in evaluation and communication to support the development of the database, engage communities to take part and influence government and donors to support further preservation of the Maori language. Progress was slower than expected due to an uncertain political situation, which prevented government actors to take part.

8. Research ICTs Africa (RIA)

RIA is a network which seeks to build an African evidence and knowledge base in support of ICT policy and regulatory processes, and to monitor and review policy and regulatory developments on the continent (Ramirez et al, 2014). In 2013, following discussions about mentorship with DECI, RIA opted instead to commission DECI-2 to undertake an evaluation of their research to policy work. DECI-2 used this as an opportunity to apply its UFE approach and gain some practical experience for the team, particularly the East African mentors who were relatively new to UFE. After finishing the evaluation in early 2014, DECI-2 remained in contact with RIA and, as a result of hearing about the benefit of DECI-2 ResCom mentoring from another partner, from mid-2016 have begun to mentor RIA's newly appointed evaluation and communication staff person.

9. Exploring the Emerging Impacts of Open Data in Developing Countries (ODDC)

ODDC was an IDRC funded research project managed by the World Wide Web Foundation and implemented through 17 sub-grants to research partners from 12 countries around the world, conducting research on open data and governance. ODDC was introduced to DECI-2 by IDRC at early stages of both projects. Despite several meetings, including one face to face meeting, ODDC were not able to assign the resources needed for the network as a whole to be part of DECI-2. However, attempts were made to identify regional partners of ODDC which would be more manageable as participants of DECI-2. Out of these discussions, just one partner in the LAC region emerged as a potential participant, Fundación AVINA, and it was decided that mentoring should be focussed on the CONDATOS conference they were involved in.

10. The Latin America and the Caribbean Open Data Conference (CONDATOS)

CONDATOS was first launched in 2013 as an initiative of the Uruguayan Government, with funding for diverse sources, to convene key players that could help coordinate regional efforts around Open Data (Navas, 2015). The second conference in 2014 attracted twice as many people as the first and this prompted the organisers to formalise the event for the 2015 edition. DECI-2 was invited to present UFE to the organisers and it was agreed that DECI-2 would provide mentoring to support the evaluation of the 2015 conference. The process was necessarily sped up because the timing of the event only gave three months to plan the evaluation. Nonetheless, a use-focused evaluation was conducted and has provided actionable insights for the 2016 edition of the conference.

11. Digital Learning for Development (DL4D)

DL4D is a network funded by IDRC and DFID and administered by the Foundation for Information Technology Education and Development (FIT-ED) of the Philippines. It aims to improve educational systems in developing countries in Asia through testing digital learning innovations and scaling proven ones. DL4D funds a series of research project under four key research themes: massive open online courses (MOOCs), intelligent tutoring systems, digital game-based learning, and learning analytics. DL4D was introduced to DECI-2 in early 2016 and after several visits from the DECI-2 Asia-

based mentors have agreed to take part in mentoring, which is starting at the time of writing, albeit slowly.

12. Escuela de Administración, Finanzas e Instituto Tecnológico (EAFIT)

EAFIT, one of the top private universities in Colombia, runs two projects, *Plan Digital TESO* and *Colegio 10 TIC*, aiming to promote the use of ICTs in schools in Colombia with the ultimate goal of generating a culture of innovation in participating schools. The projects themselves are funded by Colombian stakeholders from the public and private sectors and IDRC is funding a research initiative that seeks to document the learning experience and its implications for public policy. The team involved in evaluation and communication for the two projects was introduced to DECI-2 in September 2016 and the two parties are just beginning to discuss a short-term mentoring process to aid with evaluation and communication, particularly to make them more use and stakeholder oriented.

13. Regional Fund for Digital Innovation in Latin America and the Caribbean (FRIDA)

FRIDA is grant programme managed by the Latin America and Caribbean Network Information Centre (LACNIC) since 2004. The program provides funding as well as capacity building and networking opportunities to civil society organizations, enterprises, governments, and universities seeking to unlock the potential of information and communications technology for the region's development. FRIDA is a member of the SEED Alliance and was introduced to DECI-2 by fellow member ISIF, which was a participating programme in DECI-1. Although there was initial interest in joining DECI-2, staffing changes and restructuring meant that there was insufficient momentum and resources to participate. The decision was made in December 2014 to cease engagement with FRIDA.

14. Fund for Internet Research and Education (FIRE)

FIRE, the Africa equivalent of FRIDA and ISIF, is a grant programme managed by the African Network Information Centre (AFRINIC) and is also a member of the SEED Alliance. Similar to FRIDA, FIRE was introduced to DECI-2 by ISIF and was initially interested but did not end up committing to the process. Like FRIDA, high staff turn-over, particularly senior management, and lack of resources proved to be too much of an obstacle.

Annex 4: Comparator programmes

1. Think Tank Initiative

The Think Tank Initiative (TTI) is a programme to support think tanks in the global south through provision of core funding and support for quality research, policy influence and organisation performance. Phase 1, from 2008 to 2014, supported 48 think tanks in 22 countries and phase 2, from 2014 to 2019, supports 43 think tanks in 20 countries. It is funded by a group of six donors, including bilateral aid agencies and private foundations; and managed by IDRC.

Since its launch TTI has trialled several models for building capacity of its partners. A review capacity development of phase one lists the following mechanisms: a mentoring programme, matching funds, opportunity funds, partner conference, internships, peer review, action research, events and workshops (Weyrauch, 2014). In phase two, TTI emphasises mentoring, opportunity funds and learning events (Think Tank Initiative, 2016) <http://www.thinktankinitiative.org>.

There is one initiatives in particular that is relevant for this evaluation and explored further: the Policy Engagement and Communications (PEC) programme. It is also pertinent to mention the Strengthening Capacity of ILAIPP and its Members project and the opportunity funds as examples of the current capacity building approach.

PEC took place at the end of phase 1, from 2013 to 2014 and had a budget of CAD 3.1m over one year and targeted 42 of the 48 think tanks to build capacity for research communication and policy engagement at the organisational level through mentoring. PEC was implemented through three contractors who were awarded following a competitive process. One contractor managed capacity building for four partners in West Africa, one managed 13 partners in Anglophone Africa and one managed 10 partners in Latin America and 15 partners in South Asia. While overall the experience was positive for the majority of participants, it was judged as over-ambitious and had difficulties in delivering mentoring to such a large number of organisations and in such a short space of time. Five out of the 42 participating think tanks dropped out part way through the programme, mostly because they didn't think PEC would benefit them but in one case because of organisational change.

Table 4: comparison of PEC with DECI-2

Similarities of PEC with DECI-2	Differences with DECI-2
Took a mentoring approach	Nearly three times the number of participating partners (42 compared with 16)
Worked in multiple regions	Only a fifth of the time (one year compared with five years)
IDRC contracted out the management of the mentoring programme	Almost eight times the budget (30m compared with 400k)
Focussed on communications capacity and included strategy development	Implemented through three contractors (compared with one)
Mentors were from the same region as their mentees	Contractors selected through competitive tender (compared with direct contract)
Mentors on average had two or three partners each	Mentors took more active role, more towards consultancy (compared with strict mentoring)
Designed to go at partners' pace	Didn't focus on evaluation capacity
Produced guidance documents and articles, by mentors and mentees	Focussed at the organisational level (compared with project level)
	Readiness not a major consideration
	Didn't take an explicit action-research approach

Experiences in phase one made it clear that the differences across the four regions means that a single approach to capacity building (as seen in PEC) was no going to work. In phase two, the capacity building components diversified and different approaches were pursued in different regions, largely in response to demand from partners. In Latin America, a network of TTI partners was invited to submit a proposal for addition funds to support a capacity building programme of their own design. This was awarded as a one year grant of CAD 240k and supported 12 think tanks. The network was responsible for designing and delivering its own capacity building programme.

In Asia, capacity development took a different approach with partners encouraged to apply for *opportunity funds* which enabled them to address their perceived capacity development needs through research projects which would be funded on top of their core grant. One such grant which was awarded was to support the development of a new strategy for a south-south research network to engage with the Sustainable Development Goals.

What can DECI-2 learn?

- The TTI PEC project was ambitious in its scale. It demonstrates that working at larger scales introduces many new challenges, namely how to ensure quality and consistency over a large number of mentor-mentee relationships while allowing sufficient flexibility to respond to the needs of partners. Many participants found the process too rigid and standardised.
- PEC also highlights the importance of giving sufficient time within a mentoring process for partners to digest information and move at their own pace, rather than imposing a tight timeframe on the process – one year in the case of PEC.
- Finally, PEC shows that there is no standard approach to capacity building that will work for all partners in all regions and a broader strategy is needed to offer a range of approaches including but not limited to mentoring. Particularly a mix of demand-led approaches (partners planning their own capacity building) and supply-led approaches (partners invited to participate in something set up by someone else).

2. Climate Change Adaptation in Africa

CCAA was an ambitious research and capacity-building program on adaptation to climate change in Africa, funded by IDRC and DFID over six years from 2006 to 2012. Building capacity of researchers and research institutes was paramount in the theory of change of CCAA to strengthen Africa-based leadership on adaptation research and a focus on the vulnerable (IDRC. 2012). This included building evaluation capacity to support learning in adaptation, strengthen decision making and help organisations be more competitive in attracting additional funding for adaptation (Beaulieu et al, 2016). There were two capacity building strategies; a series of three training workshops with project staff focussing on training and implementing a customised application of Outcome Mapping, and a mentoring programme for 16 partners to receive dedicated support for Outcome Mapping application. CCAA hired 12 mentors from the region to support partners, a mixture of individual consultants and service provider organisations.

The project was seen as largely successful. An independent evaluation of the initiative found that around 400 people benefited directly or indirectly from the mentoring process, including project staff and their partners through engaging in Outcome Mapping processes with the projects. When interviewed, the vast majority of project partners acknowledged the effectiveness of the Outcome Mapping approach but found it time intensive.

Table 5: comparison of CCAA with DECI-2

Similarities of CCAA with DECI-2	Differences with DECI-2
Included a mentoring programme	Mentors identified and contracted directly by IDRC
Mentors were from the same region as their mentees.	Focussed on facilitating a particular method (Outcome Mapping)
Focussed on evaluation capacity	Didn't include communication capacity
Worked in multiple regions (North, West, East and Southern Africa)	Worked with twice as many mentors
Worked with similar number of partners	Included training workshops as well as mentoring
Aimed to also build capacity of mentors	Aimed to develop a community of practice among partners
Involved meta-research to develop customised methodologies	

What can DECI-2 learn?

- Too much focus on a single methodology and in the opinion of the project officer, not enough on collection of baseline data.
- They tried delivering support through distance learning but found that suppliers took too long to prepare the platform and they ran out of time to implement it.
- The M&E mentoring was managed internally by one IDRC PO and they found that other POs tended to disengage from M&E as a result, assuming that everything was being taken care of by the other. They addressed this by including all POs in planning and monitoring the mentoring process and later by building M&E support into project budgets such that POs of those projects would be responsible.
- Even though they found the administration of this project overwhelming they felt that they would not have learned as much if it had been managed by an outside contractor.

- It was hoped that a community of practice would emerge among partners and that by facilitating exchanges throughout the project that interactions would continue after the project. This didn't happen. It is thought that without the consultants the partners lacked the momentum to engage.

3. Monitoring & Evaluation in Ecohealth Projects: Managing Change, Coping with Complexity

From 2008 to 2012, the *Managing Change, Coping with Complexity* (MCCC) project supported four IDRC funded Ecohealth research projects to develop their monitoring and evaluation systems. The project originated in the Ecohealth programme at IDRC in order to explore and promote an approach to M&E that was complementary with the complex systems approach which the programme was taking for the research and to stimulate learning about the research process and outcomes. An open call for participation was put out to all IDRC funded Ecohealth projects and four were selected to participate: three in Latin America and one in Sub-Saharan Africa. The project was led by a consultant, contracted by IDRC, and implemented on the ground by four mentors who were selected and matched to the four projects.

Support was provided initially through a workshop involving all mentors, representatives from the partner projects, the team leader and other contributors (including one of the DECI PIs) in which a common approach was developed, partners' individual needs were assessed and work plans were drawn up. Following this, the mentors visited the projects in person to support development of M&E plans. Projects applied either Outcome Mapping, Outcome Harvesting or Most Significant Change, depending on the specific requirements. Implementation of the M&E systems was supported through virtual collaboration, and an online discussion among the whole team provided a mid-term reflection.

Overall the experience was positive for the participants. Two of the mentoring partnerships were very successful, with one transforming their research approach from research on people to research with people, and the other demonstrating critical thinking about their theory of change. Of the two which were less successful, one was hindered through clash of personalities and the other was hindered because the partner was not used to this style of capacity building and expected training. The process required a heavy investment in human resources as it represented quite a shift in thinking for the projects, particularly with the large, global research institutes that were participating.

Table 6: comparison of Ecohealth MCCC with DECI-2

Similarities of Ecohealth MCCC with DECI-2	Differences with DECI-2
Took a mentoring approach	Worked with 4 partners
IDRC contracted out the management of the mentoring programme	One mentor assigned to one partner
Included meta-research	Mentors were already methodology experts
Worked in multiple regions	Stronger aim to introduce particular methodology
Focussed on evaluation as a learning tool	Didn't consider research communications
Worked over two years with partners	Supported monitoring processes as well as evaluation
Mentors were based in the same region as their mentees	
Mentees involved in process reflection	

What can DECI-2 learn?

- The experience of the Ecohealth MCCC project mostly matches DECI-2's approach, the main difference being that they worked with a smaller number of partners and mentors were only assigned one partner each.
- One of the lessons the team drew from this experience was the importance of personalities in the mentor-mentee relationship. Had they thought more about the dynamics at the outset they may have been able to avoid some clashes which hindered progress in one of the projects.
- Another lesson was the importance of using mentors who are known to the partners already, e.g. working in their field or in their networks. The project where this was the case worked significantly smoother than the others, despite other institutional challenges.
- Finally, they felt that they relied too heavily on using experts to bring expertise and not enough on enabling nascent capabilities or shared learning.

4. Building Capacity for Ecohealth Research and Practice in Asia (BECA)

The BECA project was part of the larger Ecohealth Emerging Infectious Diseases Initiative (EID) in the Ecohealth programme in IDRC. Running for just over three years from late 2009 to early 2013, its aim was to build expertise in ecosystem approaches, which were relatively novel, to health management among researchers, development practitioners, and policy makers in China and Southeast Asia and to develop knowledge in the region with input to Ecohealth policy formulation. The main approach was through building a network of experts across the region. IDRC commissioned an external contractor to manage the project, and they sub-contracted the team lead role to an academic in another institution. They worked primarily through six volunteers acting as focal points across the region; people with established reputations and some influence on the policy process. Ten workshops were held over the course of the project, targeting 100 individuals.

The project had problems tracking its own outcomes and as such very little is known about the effect on the institutions involved. There are discreet stories of positive effects, such as a university adopting Ecohealth in its teaching programme. In general the project was not greatly successful. While it was judged to have contributed to a growth in the awareness of ecosystem approaches and focus on Ecohealth principles, it suffered from management issues and poor performance and an external evaluation surmised that more could have been achieved. It was expected that the numerous workshops would result in a series of articles and policy briefs but only four such outputs were produced.

BECA's challenges stem from the fact that it was led by an institution outside the region, with little prior experience with this kind of programme and delegating leadership to someone with insufficient time to dedicate to the project.

Since BECA, the Ecohealth programme has changed direction radically and is no longer engaged in *field building* and as a result, capacity development is no longer a priority.

Table 7: comparison of BECA with DECI-2

Similarities of BECA with DECI-2	Differences with DECI-2
Engaged in meta-research	Aimed at individuals rather than organisations or projects
IDRC contracted out management of the project	Working in one region only
Engaged in supporting a change in thinking among partners	Focussed on research capacity in general
	Used volunteers as local contact points
	Main strategy was networking

What can DECI-2 learn?

- The lessons from BECA are largely irrelevant for DECI-2 as they are already addressed in the mentorship model adopted by DECI-2. For example, the project completion report for BECA notes that the main lessons are to design capacity building efforts to meet the needs of participants rather than the intellectual and pedagogical interests of the capacity builders; and that capacity building should be led locally rather than by flying in teams of foreign trainers.
- BECA demonstrates several limitations in its capacity building model. They found that focussing on individuals with little concern for the institution they are working in is unlikely to influence significant change. Also that relying on volunteers to act as within-region representatives is insufficient in carrying momentum from one event to the next. Finally, that workshops alone are insufficient for coaching participants in developing outputs.

5. Capacity Building in Resource Mobilization

CBRM was an initiative of IDRC's Partnership and Business Development Division (now called the Donor Partnerships Division) and ran from 2003 to 2009. A second phase, Resource Mobilization for Research, ran from 2011 to 2016 – more on this below. The project aimed to increase and diversify the funding sources of grantees across IDRC's programmes. It was developed in recognition that in order to fulfil its mission to foster new knowledge that can improve lives and livelihoods across the developing world, IDRC needs to go above and beyond funding research projects and to support the organisational performance and financial sustainability of grantee organizations – to help them move away from a reliance on project funding.

The first phase had three broad capacity building strategies: workshops, advisory services and research tools. 20 workshops took place over 6 years, with 350 people participating from 250 partner organisations. The workshops were intended to introduce basic concepts of resource mobilisation. Training of training was also provided to support a cadre of consultants who would be able to support partners in the future. Follow up opportunities were offered to all partners participating in workshops who wanted additional support in the form of advisory services. In total 28 organisations took up this offer and received tailored support, commonly to help develop tools, strategies, work plans or proposals to address resource mobilisation issues. In addition to this the project also developed a training toolkit, cases studies and a scoping study.

The project was seen as successful and innovative as a way of supporting grantees beyond research grants. The independent evaluation noted that demand for capacity building was high but supply of available consultants was not high enough. The evaluation noted the effectiveness of the training

workshops but did not comment on the efficacy of the workshops versus the advisory services. Team members, though, felt that workshops alone were not sufficient to address the range of needs among grantees.

A second phase was launched in 2011, named Resource Mobilisation for Research. With similar aims to CBRM, RMR had two main strategies; individual grants ranging from 30k to 418k following an organisational assessment, and what is called a cohort model. Clusters of four research organisations in East Africa and five in West Africa with similar needs were supported by two third-party technical specialists contracted by IDRC. The cohort arrangement allowed the organisations to learn from each other as well as the technical specialist. Eight out of nine respondents stated that their RMR activities led to new projects or directions their organizations had undertaken after the RMR support has concluded.

The programme has not continued after the end of RMR.

Table 8: comparison of CBRM with DECI-2

Similarities of CBRM with DECI-2	Differences with DECI-2
Included development of pedagogical material	Managed internally in IDRC
Documented case studies	Works across all programmes in IDRC
Used consultants to provide tailored support to partners	Addressed resource mobilisation capacity rather than evaluation or communication
	Targeted organisation level rather project level
	Included many more workshops for training partners

What can DECI-2 learn?

- CBRM has had very similar experiences as DECI-2. E.g. they too have found that long-term focus is needed for organisational development results, that readiness is key to supporting and enabling change, that local capacity in providing capacity building is required, that training is just the first step and that there is much more to add beyond.
- Other lessons learned by CBRM could be of value to DECI-2, including the use of mini-grants as a demand-led approach to putting into practice the skills and techniques learned during workshops, and participatory organisational assessment approaches to provide an accurate picture of needs and also help to promote organizational buy-in.

6. Others comparators

Below is a brief overview of four other comparators for which there was less information available to the evaluators but nonetheless each gives a useful insight into how capacity building of researchers is being practiced. Like the above programmes, there is a dominance of demand-led approaches (except the first example) where capacity building is an implicit part of research funding rather than an explicit programme by itself.

These additional programmes also demonstrate the diversity of capacity building initiatives and that research programmes rarely adopt similar approaches. This suggests that there is no best practice in this field and that programmes are still experimenting with different ways to build capacity of researchers. Three innovations which may be interested for DECI-2 stick out from this set: CARIAA's use of institutional assessments to monitor grantees' capacity over time; KSI's use of events to foster

‘horizontal capacity building’ between grantees; and KNOWFOR’s involvement of M&E mentors at the design stage of projects to inform theory of change and M&E plans as they are being developed.

- i. **Building gender analysis capacity in SEARCH grantees:** SEARCH (Strengthening Equity through Applied Research Capacity Building in e-Health), a five year, IDRC funded research programme on e-health and m-health in health systems, commissioned RinGs (Research in Gender and Ethics) to provide seven grantees with training and support for gender analysis. Three consultants worked four months each and provided training through webinars, review of project documentation and tailored recommendations for each project. They have seen some improvement in capacity among partners but generally it is too soon – an evaluation was ongoing at the time of interview. The general impression was that the capacity building came too late to have a significant effect on the research.
- ii. **Collaborative Adaptation Research Initiative in Africa and Asia (CARIAA):** A five year DFID/IDRC funded research programme implemented through four research consortia. Capacity building of researchers is a key output area and features in the programme logframe. There is no centrally organised capacity building programme, rather capacity building is largely the responsibility of consortia to organise – predominantly through north-south and south-south partnerships, conference attendance and PhD sponsorship. An opportunity fund is available whereby consortia can propose initiatives to IDRC for additional funding. An institutional capacity assessment designed by IISD (International Institute of Sustainability and Development) will measure progress of all 20+ organisations involved in the consortia.
- iii. **Knowledge Sector Initiative (KSI):** A joint programme between the governments of Australia and Indonesia that seeks to improve the lives of the Indonesian people through better quality public policies that make better use of research, analysis and evidence. Like the Think Tank Initiative, KSI provides core grants to research institutes across a range of policy areas. It also supports knowledge users (government departments and agencies) and knowledge intermediaries to support better communication and use of research. KSI very much takes a demand led approach, or in their words a horizontal capacity building approach, whereby grantees suggest their own needs and how to address them and KSI supports them and links them with other grantees. KSI support grantees through a lively events series whereby they can learn from one another and hear from external experts in different fields, and also through a grantee-led network on research excellence, seeking to share experiences on research uptake and policy influence.
- iv. **International Forestry Knowledge (KNOWFOR):** A DFID funded programme aiming to address the gap between the supply and uptake of knowledge by practitioners and decision makers in the forestry sector. It is delivered through a partnership of three institutions: the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Bank Program on Forests (PROFOR). One of the innovations of KNOWFOR is the approach to design, monitoring, evaluation and learning (DMEL). The three implementing partners have received support from a supporting partner, Clear Horizons, to help them develop new forms of results monitoring and evaluation to inform organisational management as well as promote a wider conversation on linking short-term, localised interventions to long-term, broader social, economic and environmental benefits. Two consultants support the three partners to develop their results framework. While they themselves don’t consider this as capacity building, the support is delivered through a mentoring mode more than a consultancy mode.

7. Online resources

Given the increasing emphasis on online learning, and the DECI-2 team's exploration of e-learning, it seems appropriate to draw on prior knowledge of the evaluators of existing online resources dedicated to building capacity in evaluation or communications skills. The difference between these initiatives and DECI-2 is that they have a much broader audience and far less opportunity to directly influence them. For example, all but two (DRUSSA and 3ie) are open resources rather than directed toward particular participants. Their strategies to support their audiences are very passive and one-directional compared with DECI-2 but they generally reach many more people. The initiatives most similar to DECI-2 are DRUSSA and 3ie as they are tailored towards specific participants that are affiliated with the programmes. However, neither of these are particularly good examples of engaging researchers through online resources as neither show regular engagement or content generation. None of them demonstrate how online engagement can be used as a supplement to mentoring, as in the case of DECI-2.

If DECI-2 wanted to supplement its mentoring with broader engagement with a wider audience, then these online networks would be natural channels to use. If DECI wanted to develop its own virtual toolkit, then these would be good examples to learn from. The first seven are related to communication the next two to monitoring and evaluation and the last is a combination of the two.

The key lessons are:

- Even with a large readership base and consistent contributors, online discussions via comments pages or otherwise are scarce – people consume online far more than they engage. Only through active facilitation do people engage in online discussions.
- There are several resource libraries and toolkits already available on the web and there is limited value in developing a new one, unless there is a need to tailor to specific audiences.
- It is unlikely that a lack of access to tools and publications is a major barrier to learning about evaluation and communication in research programmes. It's more likely that people don't know what they are looking for, where to look, or how to implement – and thus that what is needed are ways to help people with these challenges.
- Common in many of the examples below is the nurturing of a community of readers and contributors and this takes dedicated staff and time.
- It may be more strategic to use platforms that already exist (such as many of those below) rather than to build a new platform from scratch.

10 selected examples:

1. **Research to action** (<http://www.researchtoaction.org>): A website portal with regular content (4-5 articles per month) produced by a community of >100 volunteer contributors, on topics including knowing your audience, making your research accessible, and monitoring and evaluation. Key articles also curated into How To guides on selected topics: capacity building, policy briefs, research impact, theory of change and update strategy. Managed by CommsConsult with four people managing the platform: editorial, comms coordinator, learning coordinator, content and social media coordinator.
2. **On think tanks** (<https://onthinktanks.org>): Originally a personal blog, now a portal with hundreds of articles related to think tanks: management of TTs, leadership in TTs, role of TTs in national and international context, art of influencing, funding of TTs and evaluation of the work of TTs. There are 6-10 articles per month from a group of around 150 contributors with interviews as a common format. Also includes competitions, e-learning, events,

partnerships. Managed by a group of seven individuals: two directors, three editors, programme manager and digital content editor. Based in Latin America and the UK.

3. **LSE impact blog** (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences>): A website portal and blog managed by the London School of Economics. Primarily aimed at social science researchers in academic institutes in UK, topics include research impact, research quality, research writing, policy relevance of research, public engagement in research, social media, research evaluation, knowledge management in academia, Research Excellence Framework and related UK policy. As well as web articles, the site also includes curated collections, how-to-guides and a book published in 2014. Run by a managing editor supported by a board of 16 members.
4. **RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA)** (<http://roma.odi.org>): An e-guide to policy influence and engagement, comprising three core chapters: diagnosing the problem, developing a strategy, monitoring and evaluating. Also contains case studies. Written by a team of six researchers from ODI, UK. Developed by a web design agency in London. Minimal upkeep by a comms officer at ODI.
5. **Evidence Based Policy in Development Network (EBPDN)** (<http://www.ebpdn.org>): An open community of practice of over 3000 individuals targeting development professionals interested in the intersection between evidence, policy and practice. Main activity is an email discussion list and web forum with 15-20 posts per month. Discussions cover a range of topics on the theory and practice of generating, communicating and using evidence for pro-poor policy making in international development. It is not facilitated actively and most posts are one-off announcements and knowledge sharing. It is managed by ODI in the UK with one staff member allocated minimal time for admin and moderation.
6. **Development Research Uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa (DRUSSA)** (<http://www.drussa.net>): A website portal hosting blogs and static articles (3-4 articles per month) primarily for the 22 research-intensive universities in West, East and Southern Africa that are part of the project, as well as the government ministries they are engaging with. Includes sections on tools & tips, case studies, document repository and newsletters. Like DECI, the online platform is one component of a larger programme of support to the universities. DRUSSA is managed by a consortium comprising of: UK-based Association of Commonwealth Universities, Organisation Systems Design, and The Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) at the University of Stellenbosch.
7. **3ie Policy Impact Toolkit** (*Site no longer online*): An electronic guide to policy impact designed for researchers receiving grants from 3ie (International Initiative for Impact Evaluation). Includes static pages offering tailored advice, procedures and templates on different topics around planning, implementing and measuring policy engagement strategies to support the use of impact evaluations. The guide is supplemented by a library of resources (publications, videos, presentation slides, websites) tagged against multiple topics. The site was commissioned and managed by 3ie in the UK and developed by three people: a content lead from 3ie, a designer/developer from ODI and a research assistant from ODI. No staff were dedicated to upkeep and the site remained static after development until it was taken down in 2016.

8. **BetterEvaluation (BE)** (<http://www.betterevaluation.org>): A website portal dedicated to sharing information about evaluation methods. Comprised of descriptions of over 300 tools and methods arranged into 34 task across seven clusters: managing evaluations; defining what is being evaluated; framing the evaluation; describing activities, outcomes, impacts and context; understanding causes of outcomes and impacts; synthesising data; and reporting and supporting use of findings. Content is provided from a large group of volunteer contributors, with a substantial amount developed prior to launch. Resources, blogs, events and newsletters are regularly updated. BE is managed by a team of four based in a university in Melbourne.
9. **Outcome Mapping Learning Community (OMLC)** (<http://www.outcomemapping.ca>): A virtual community of practice for learning about Outcome Mapping, an approach to planning, monitoring and evaluation. Includes email and forum discussions, resource library, events listing, project listings, consultant listings and face to face events. Topics include theory of change, planning influencing strategies, tracking behaviour change, outcome harvesting and data management. The community has been active since 2006 and now includes over 4000 members across the world. The OMLC is registered as an independent not-for-profit entity in Belgium and governed by a board of seven volunteers. Staff include two part time individuals (one day per week each) to coordinate all activities, website content and online facilitation.
10. **Platform for Evidence-based Learning & Communication for Social Change (PELICAN)** (<https://dgroups.org/groups/pelican>): An open email list for people interested in M&E and communications in development. The forum attracts a high volume of emails, including job offers, requests for proposals and thought-provoking discussions. There are no supporting knowledge management functions beyond basic moderation of emails. Previously funded by IDRC and now run on minimal administration by ECDPM in the Netherlands.

Annex 5: Suggestions for the future of DECI from interviewees

Interviewees were asked if they had suggestions for DECI-2, particularly in the case that a third phase is implemented. Suggestions from partners and mentors are summarised below.

1. Suggestions from partners

Partners' suggestions cluster around four main areas: DECI's own communication, the UFE and ResCom content of DECI-2's approach, the mentoring process and IDRC's involvement.

i. DECI's communication

Partners suggestions centred on how DECI sells itself and its approach. There were several comments about making the initial offer to partners clearer, including the criteria for readiness, and making explicit what was expected of the partner. One partner recommended developing a set of principles shared across the team to ensure a common approach and/or a consistent story about DECI and how it works which can be used as a standard introduction. Another recommended being more confident and vocal about the approach – they said it works, it's different and it has a clear unique selling point; the team should be proud of what they have developed.

ii. UFE and ResCom content

There were two comments about UFE, one that the process could take into consideration other M&E requirements within the team/organisation, including reporting to IDRC (from an experience that managing multiple independent evaluation and reporting processes was quite a handful), another that the mentoring could provide more support for implementation of findings. There was one comment about ResCom, namely that it could first address communication at the organisation level before addressing specific project level support (from a concern that underlying organisational deficiencies were not addressed and made the process more difficult). Finally, there was more general comment that DECI could address a growing trend that organisations working internationally are facing increasing risks to their sustainability and that the approach is well suited to help organisations face questions about their future.

iii. Mentoring process

Several partners mentioned the need for more face to face mentoring, with suggestions of one meeting at the start for mentor and mentee to get to know each other's work, and one meeting towards the end to wrap up the process. One partner suggested that if there was only one meeting then it's probably best in the first third of the project, after a virtual introduction but before significant work had been done. There were mixed opinions about virtual mentoring with one participants of the ISIF webinars suggesting to cut out the online learning in favour of a two-day workshop, and another partner suggesting to make the tools available for online collaboration. There were two other suggestions relating to the mentoring process, firstly to make the introduction to UFE and ResCom softer for mentees with no prior experience, meaning a slower start with more background before jumping in with specific steps. Finally, to have a clearer structure to the mentoring process so mentees understand how they should interact with materials and what is expected of them.

iv. IDRC involvement

Partners made several suggestions as to how IDRC could be more involved. For example, POs could encourage more peer-peer learning among their grantees, including learning about the mentoring;

POs could also play a role in linking external evaluations (that they are involved in in some way) to the DECI UFE process; and advising programmes in early stages to include sufficient budget lines for evaluation and ResCom. There was also a comment about IDRC playing a stronger role in advocating the DECI-approach to other donors.

2. Suggestions from mentors

Mentors also made suggestions about the future of DECI along similar lines as partners: including about the mentoring process, DECI-2 audience, the UFE and ResCom content and IDRC involvement.

i. Mentoring process

Three mentors suggested that in the future, UFE and ResCom mentoring could be provided by just one mentor rather than two, although it is understood from the DECI-2 Principal Investigators that this issue was debated among the team and others disagree with this idea. Two mentors mentioned the importance of supporting more than one field trip in the mentoring package. Two mentors suggested condensing the UFE and ResCom materials into an online resource kit, with the caveat that this would only be valuable as an accompaniment to mentoring. Other ideas include inviting previous mentees to join DECI as mentors and limiting the number of partners to focus on higher quality over quantity – if resources were limited.

ii. DECI-2 audience

There were several suggestions relating to who DECI should be communicating with. Two mentors suggested joining up with other initiatives with similar aims in order to create a community of learning. Another mentor suggested a more concerted effort at influencing IDRC to take on the approach more widely in the Centre, while another suggested targeting other donors to see where else this kind of approach can work. One mentor recommended DECI move from targeting projects to targeting academics, policy makers and practitioners working in schools in developing countries in order to influence people's approaches to communication and learning prior to their arrival at the workplace – where it is often too late.

iii. UFE and ResCom content

The mentors made a few suggestions for what DECI includes in its content for partners. One suggestion was to include a data analysis or data management component, including more advice for selection and use of specific tools and techniques. Another was to consider UFE for monitoring, not only evaluation, as that is what many projects struggle with; and one mentor suggested including gender and equity issues into the content. Regarding research communication, the only suggestion was to make it broader than for research only, e.g. by calling it focussed communication, as the content is appealing to projects beyond the research world.

iv. IDRC involvement

One mentor made a suggestion that IDRC POs provide mentors more feedback about their perception of how partners are reacting to DECI, and about how the partner's work fits in to a bigger picture

Annex 6: Thinkpiece:- DECI and social mobilisation?

In the analysis in the main report we have made passing reference to the similarities of the underlying principles of DECI and the processes embodied in participatory community development and social mobilisation. We wondered how much the DECI implementation team had drawn on the community development literature and in the review process it was confirmed that both Dal Brodhead and Ricardo Ramirez have strong community development backgrounds. It is very likely that the principles of CD have been drawn upon intuitively if not explicitly.

As evaluators, we wondered whether there was more in the community development literature that could explicitly inform the DECI model. For instance, community development literature has considerable discussion about the characteristics required of a facilitator, enabler or animator. There is much discussion about where they come from and what the essential skill set of an animator are. A 'foreigner' i.e. a full outsider, can connect with cultures by adopting culturally sensitive behaviour, and equally break a blossoming relationship by a misplaced word – particularly true in face cultures (where the errant word causes someone to lose face). While we may hope that professionals in networked economies have set aside their intense sensitivity to cultural sleights, the literature is replete with examples of foreigners' faux pas in front of national leaders. Cultural sensitivity is therefore important to developing genuine relationship with the target community. However, at the same time, an outsider also has the baggage of 'power'. They may be seen as representing a particular cultural group, or coming from an organisation, representing that institution. Particularly when dealing with poor communities it is a mistake to believe that the foreigner can ever be truly at one, 'incarnated', within the community – a British visitor always has their passport, and should civil war break out they can rely on resources the local community cannot.

So, should the animator be from the community? The literature has many ideas on this as well. Being from the community they may have their own power relationships with the established leadership, they may have family ties that prevent free and fair implementation of the goals, they may have a lack of knowledge about wider opportunities and processes (that the outsider may have and bring into the community). So, should there be an expatriate, someone from the culture who has studied abroad and gained that wider knowledge and lost their familial allegiances? Here again warnings are given that expatriates are often less understood than true outsiders – they look like they belong but they have adopted the culture of their host country.

These observations are just a few insights into the characteristics of an animator from the community development literature. How then would they apply to DECI? We have seen that the mentors were in many cases seen as 'working alongside' the partners rather than coming in to teach. That decision to even up the power imbalances is key to creating self-motivated empowered communities; whether communities of rural households or communities of researchers.

Similarly, when we consider the constituencies of both DECI and community mobilisation, we can see how an adaptive process is important. The mobilisation literature emphasises going at the pace of the people, not trying to impose an external agenda on the community. It also discusses that the animator should not come in with preconceived solutions. All communities need water, but whether that be a hand dug well, a commissioned contracted borehole or rainwater harvesting all depends on the specific situational circumstances and there is rarely a one size fits all. The role of the animator is to ask questions and draw out the thoughts of the community – get them to voice their hopes and aspirations. Where there is opportunity for action the animator can enable the

community to plan the action. Some writers suggest that the legacy of good community mobilisation is not the water point or the improved farming, but embedding the idea that communities working together can identify solutions and solve problems. Indeed, the legacy is increased capacity in the analysis of a problem and the creativity by which it might be addressed.

So too one of the strengths of the mentor approach has been to ask questions and ‘walk alongside’ the research communities. This is important because it has embedded the reflection process in the partners. The outcomes of section 5.3 are about changes in attitude, changes in praxis. Researchers have questioned their assumptions and instead of just having a fixed plan (the equivalent thought to – ‘we do this because this is the way our fathers did it’), they can adapt and accommodate a changing landscape. There will always be new problems; in community development solving a water or agriculture problem now can be a temporary fix as climate change affects the seasonal rainfall new solutions may need to be found – the legacy is found in an adaptive community.

We don’t wish to belabour the point, but we see considerable similarities between DECI and (any) community mobilisation, and respectfully suggest that any planning for DECI-3- could include looking at the lessons of DECI-2 through the lens of social mobilisation. We also note that change management literature (with Adaptive management) is another wealth of insights. We suggest a review of literature stepping away from ‘capacity building’ and gathering insights from these other libraries.

One last point concerning readiness. Community mobilisation literature talks about working at the pace of the people. One difference for DECI has been its emphasis on readiness, with the associated commitment to an MOU. This is a relatively formal approach, and rarely works in community development. As a village is approached, the traditional leadership is often the root cause of a lack of adaptability. Experience of community work in the context of an authoritative government and which had elite capture, translated into provincial, district and commune managers that were political appointees and not interested in the people and a village chief who was nominally elected but was often addicted to alcohol and surrounded by ‘yes’ men; any MOU with the village would not be worth the paper in the longer term. When DECI talks about readiness it means identifying individuals who are assigned by management to work with the DECI process. In the same way community mobilisation has to both assess the leadership and identify the individuals who may work with the animator, so too DECI attempts early on to identify leadership commitment and the individuals it may work with. One challenge though is that individuals move on (communities – migrant work; DECI – new job roles), the leadership can feel threatened by the new ideas, and the community doesn’t really know what it is signing up for (it might think it will be ‘given’ a new water supply). These challenges in the early stages are rarely settled by an MOU and in community mobilisation are catered for by ensuring a transparency of process (so all the community can see what is being discussed and by whom) and giving the community time to respond. In the feedback, it was argued that the MOU makes clear the responsibilities of the parties and in several cases DECI jointly agreed to cancel as circumstances changed. It was suggested that communities want to understand and control/influence/decide on the role of outsiders – the MOU is one way of doing this.

Our point is not that there is a right or wrong way per se, rather our point is that perhaps the community development or social mobilisation literature might be able to shed light onto these sorts of discussions. Should an MOU be in place from the start with an existing leadership? Could a more flexible approach enable those on the margin to move towards the centre. In DECI we acknowledge this is constrained to some extent by the aims and purposes of DECI, but it might be

interesting to consider the processes used in community mobilisation to adapt to poor leadership and how they might (or might not) be applicable to DECI.